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BUT THE DETECTIVE TIGHTENED HIS CLUTCH ON HER SHOULDER, AND A STUNNING RIGHT-HANDER UNDER THE JAW BOWLED THE BIG RUFFIAN OVER SENSELESS.

OR,

The Singing Detective and His Boy Second.

BY LIEUT. A. K. SIMS,
AUTHOR OF "TOM-CAT AND PARD," "TOM-
CAT'S TERRIBLE TASK," "THE SILVER
SPORT," "CAPTAIN CACTUS," "BIL-
DAD BARNACLE," ETC., ETC.

CHAPTER I.

A KICKER CRUSHED.

THE droning of voices and the incessant shuffling of feet ceased as the twang of a guitar swept across the room. The citizens of Rocket Range, or at least a large number of them, were gathered to witness a performance which had been vauntingly advertised. "Warbling

William, the Mountain Mocking-bird and Wonder-Worker, in his Enchanting Songs and Acts of Prestidigitation and Necromancy" was to appear before them and make them forget the sorrows that crush and the cares that vex. The "Wonder-Worker" was to be ably assisted, so the bills stated, by "Master Harry, the Boy Acrobat, in his Feats of Vaulting and Tumbling."

The excitements and attractions of Rocket Range were mainly confined to high betting in the gaming rooms and the street fights which too frequently followed thereupon. Hence the advent of Warbling William had been hailed with delight, and the long hall above the principal saloon fitted up to accommodate the patrons of his exhibition.

The twang of the guitar was followed by the appearance of a dapper little man, dressed in the regulation swallow-tail cutaway and white cravat of the professional conjurer. He held his guitar daintily, and, on reaching the center of the contracted stage, made a smilingly obsequious bow to the audience.

It required but a glance, however, to show that, in spite of his cheery blandness, the world had not conferred wealth upon him in return for the heart-ease which it was his professed mission to disseminate. The once jaunty cutaway had faded to a lusterless brown, and exhibited here and there threadbare patches; the white cravat was soiled and dingy; and the shining polish of his shoes could not conceal the rents which disfigured them.

The song, one of the popular ballads of the day, was rendered in a clear, tenor voice of great compass and sweetness. It was *encored*, and he sung another, which was equally well received.

This was followed by some very clumsy jugglery, interspersed with awkward tumbling tricks by a boy. There were a number of men in the room who could have done as well or better; and the crowd speedily began to manifest its impatience by grumbling remarks and derisive hisses. The climax was reached when the "Wonder-Worker" made such a botch of the fire-eating trick that he set his frilled shirt-front ablaze.

Scarcely had the sounds of merriment ceased when a tall miner, with a week's growth of red stubble half-concealing his features, pulled his legs from under the bench in front of him and drew his form erect.

"Gentlemen!" he said, bracing one hand against the wall and thrusting the other deep into his trowser's pocket, "this hyer's jist too much fer even the good-humored and charitable people of Rocket Range. We've been induced by false promises to pay in our good dollars, an' w'ot hev we been give to show fer it? Nothin', gentlemen! Acc'hully nothin'. It's a swindle, an' I, fer one, want my money back!"

Warbling William recoiled slightly while the miner was making this speech. The action was not indicative of fear. It evinced rather a sort of mental shock, and showed that his pride was hurt by what he considered a rude and unwarranted criticism.

He rallied, however, even before the miner resumed his seat. The bland smile became blander and oilier than ever. He coolly pinned his vest across his scorched shirt-front, and impressively waved his hands for silence.

"If there is anything I admire, citizens of Rocket Range, it is the kicker—the man who kicks upon all occasions and under all circumstances. Without him life would be too much like sliding down a greased rainbow. There would be none of those little jars and jolts which serve to break the monotony and give it character."

He descended from the stage while speaking, combed a silver half-dollar out of the grizzled and unkempt locks of a man on the front row, and tossed it to the loud-voiced miner.

"If we haven't brushed away your sorrows to the extent of a half-dollar's worth, say so; and I'll comb the Philadelphia mint out of this gentleman's frosty tresses and settle the deficit."

"But, as I was saying," and he stepped backward to the stage, "I do admire a kicker. The kicker is the life of the world; and, whether he is kicking his mother-in-law into the middle of the next week or simply exercising his powers on a performance like this, he is an interesting creature. It has been my good fortune to meet him frequently, and to celebrate his many virtues I once composed a little ditty."

He picked up the guitar and strummed it reflectively.

As for the miner who had caused this sudden change in the programme, he was reddening so that it was hard to tell where his stubby beard

ended and his facial *epidermis* commenced; while the crowd roared and haw-hawed in a way that was simply maddening.

Then, with a premonitory twang of the instrument and an affected clearing of his throat, Warbling William began to sing. The words were evidently impromptu, and the tune was the then favorite one of "The Little Old Log Cabin in the Lane."

"In the lively town of Rocket Range the Warbler gave a show,

And the Kicker paid his silver at the door;
And he listened to the ringing of the guitar, and the singing;

Watched the acting;—but he said 'twas all a bore.
Then he got upon his nether limbs and kicked a mighty kick;—

For, on feeling in his purse, he chanced to think
That the remnant of his wealth was locked within his burglar-proof,

And his empty pockets could not buy a drink.

"Oh, the Kicker! Oh, the Kicker!

Triumphant may he wave,

Till time and life and hope shall all be o'er.
Without him earth would stagnate from the cradle to the grave,

And the cup of joy be lifted nevermore.

"I've met him in the cities, and I've seen him in the camps,

And my smiling he has greeted with a frown;
And he always makes things lively, and gives the world a jog—

For his bread is ever falling, butter down.
His pard, the bucking broncho, I've oft ridden on the trail,

While the cowboys flocked to patch up my remains.
But whate'er the shape you find him in, he's kicking all the time,

From the Rockies to New Mexic's sandy plains.

"Oh, the Kicker! Oh, the Kicker!

Triumphant may he wave,

Till time and life and hope shall all be o'er.
Without him earth would stagnate from the cradle to the grave,

And the cup of joy be lifted nevermore."

The song was greeted with a series of yells, whistles and cheers; and the hilarity became so general and infectious that even the kicker, whatever may have been his real feelings, was forced to join in the merriment.

Through it all the Warbler maintained his air of unfailing and smiling serenity. No footlight favorite, conscious of his hold on the public, ever met a storm of applause with such unshaken assurance and equanimity. Again and again, as the cheers rung out, he held his guitar daintily before him and bowed himself almost to the floor.

"It pleases me, gentlemen," and he laid his hand upon his heart as the uproar subsided, "to know that those choice bits of sentiment meet your approval. Similar philosophic thoughts have at various times filtered through the grayish matter of my cerebrum; and, with your kind permission, I will venture to put them into shape."

Again he strummed reflectively on the guitar, tapping his foot in time with the music, and then launched into a versified and ironical eulogy of the various foibles and eccentricities of life in the mining-camps. The hits were so palpable and taking that the good-will of the motley assemblage was irresistibly gained.

The performance ended, as it had commenced, with the rendition of a popular ballad. Then the crowd surged about him with good-humored congratulations. Smilingly making his way through the throng, the Warbler blandly approached the man whom he had held up to ridicule as the Kicker.

A momentary scowl flitted across the latter's face, but the eyes of his friends were upon him and he chased it away with an uneasy smile.

"Permit me to present my pard," said the Warbler, as the boy came forward. "We wish to thank you for getting us out of an unpleasant predicament. The show was on the point of being a flat failure when you furnished an opportunity for the exhibition of my rhyming propensities. Otherwise, I am much afraid the disgusted crowd would have hooted us out of the camp—which, you know, we couldn't very well afford."

The showman's presumptuous self-confidence and air of easy familiarity drove the slumbering anger from the miner's heart.

"Wal, if you're a mind to put it that way, I don't know as I've any call to hold that song ag'in' you. It was cute, an' I s'pose I'll be called the Kicker to the end o' my days. My name's Brown, Sam Brown,"—he extended his hand as he said it—"an' I don't giner'ly 'low any small rooster to crow over me. But, you're a good 'un, an' too much of a banty, anyway, fer me to whup!"

The statement tickled the bystanders so im-

mensely that Brown seemed to feel he had at last got the better of the Warbler in the evening's verbal dual.

As the crowd thinned out, the proprietor of the saloon approached the showman and his Boy Second.

"I'm s'prised at Brown!" he chuckled. "I thought he'd jest nacher'ly chaw ye up when the show was over. You'd be a fust-class card fer my bizness. If I c'u'd git ye to sing that way in the saloon, it'd draw a houseful ever' night. I s'pose, though, there ain't no show fer that?"

Warbling William cocked his head sidewise, like a veritable mocking-bird, and for a moment appeared to be lost in thought.

"Well, now," and he counted the words out as if weighing them, "I don't know but that would strike me favorably. You see, we haven't been getting rich at this business, although Master Harry and I made a comfortable haul this evening."

He gave a comprehensive glance at his dingy coat and worn foot-gear.

"I think I kin make it to your interest," said the proprietor, eagerly. "How would thirty dollars a week and good chuck for two strike ye?"

"And sing nightly?"

"Yes; that's all!"

"Done!" and the Warbler extended his hand to seal the contract.

CHAPTER II.

SOME DEVELOPMENTS.

"It was well done; or, as the Mountain Mocking-bird would say, the affair was a superb success."

Warbling William laughed lightly, tipped back his chair in an easy attitude, and looked at the youth who had assisted him in the evening's performance.

The latter was a keen-eyed, bright-faced lad of about fourteen.

Their room was in the "hotel" above the saloon. To it they had repaired at a late hour, and were discussing the turn of events before retiring.

"There can't be a possibility, I suppose, that we've started on a wrong scent? You fully recognized the man?"

"I'd know him if I should meet him in China!" the boy asserted, earnestly. "We're on the right track, Mr. Ware; I'm willing to take the responsibility of that."

"I was just thinking what a joke it would be, if you happen to be wrong."

Mr. Ware, as the boy had addressed him, unpinned the concealed vest and serenely surveyed his scorched shirt-front.

"We *did* botch things terribly. We're no great shakes as performers at any time, but our acting to-night was certainly bad enough to justify a lynching bee. I knew it would wake up the Kicker, should there chance to be one in the room."

A smile played over his expressive face, and he pulled thoughtfully at his tawny mustache.

"When you tipped me word that you had spotted our man, I began to scheme for an excuse to remain here. I had already sized up Mr. Saloon-keeper, and knew that an exhibition of sublime cheek, together with a lot of apt and taking doggerel, would catch him if he was to be caught."

"For a minute or two, though, I thought I would surely have to fight the Kicker, after the show was out. To avoid such a contingency required a deal of pretty talking, I can tell you. The fellow came around easier than I thought he would; and altogether we've gained a host of admirers and friends. And we may need them, every one, before we get through."

He removed his cravat, as if thinking of retiring.

"You'll want to mind your eye, Harry, my boy, to-morrow and to-morrow night, and all the time. You'll not be called on to assist the Mocking-bird in his nightly performances, and can, therefore, give your whole time to the work in hand. Don't forget that you're to shadow our man night and day, and find out if possible all he does and says."

"I'll not forget it," was the confident response.

The next morning the Warbler introduced himself to the saloon-keeper as Mr. William Ware, and throughout the day took especial pains to make himself agreeable to that individual. The latter, whose name was Shelby Tanner, was much flattered by these attentions. He evidently considered the showman a man of

note, and presented him to all who visited the place—and their name was legion.

The Warbler was at all times the suave gentleman of the song and guitar, and his mellifluous sentences and rounded periods flowed in a never-ending stream. His scorched shirt had been replaced by another with a gorgeously frilled front, but his outer garments were as dingy and his shoes as full of rents as ever.

During the heated part of the day, when the crowd had somewhat thinned out, a shapely little man, dressed in elegant and neat-fitting garments, approached the bar, and was introduced to Warbling William by the saloon-keeper with an elaborate flourish:

"This is John Leonard, the tip-toppest gentleman in Rocket Range. You ought to make a good team, an' I hope you'll git along han'some together. My friend, Mr. Ware, kin give a Philadelphia lawyer p'int in talkin', an' then beat him at his own game. I tell him he's missed his callin'. If he'd only start out as a temp'rance lecturer, he could rake in the greenbacks by the trunkful."

Leonard's keen eyes took in every detail of the Warbler's person, as he returned the latter's effusive greeting.

"Glad to know you, Mr. Ware," he asserted. "I understand that Tanner has retained you to sing for the entertainment of his customers of evenings," and with a shapely white hand he smoothed back the brown mustache that shaded his mouth.

"Leonard,—Leonard,—seems to me I've heard that name!" the Warbler mused aloud, when that gentleman had departed.

"Not much to be surprised at if ye had," Tanner observed.

"Tain't such an uncommon name but what ye might 'a' run acrost it in your travels."

"Your surmise is correct, of course. I almost forget how extensive my perambulations have been. No doubt Mr. Leonard is well known throughout the mountain country? He's wealthy, too, I should say, judging from his attire and manner. The stamp of wealth is unmistakable, Mr. Tanner."

The saloon-keeper was pleased by the compliments bestowed upon his friend and patron.

"Right ye air, Mr. Ware! John Leonard's about as well heeled as men git to be in this section. He owns the Jim Crow coal mine, and's got stock in several vallyble silver and gold mines. He holds his head high an' lives purty to'able fast, but he's got the coin to justify it."

A number of times during the afternoon, when a favorable opportunity presented, did Warbling William recur to Leonard and his doings, and by deft and guarded questions succeeded in extracting from Tanner a goodly quantity of miscellaneous information.

The Warbler's singing that night drew an immense crowd. He seemed in excellent voice and spirits, and his wit and ready repartee, together with the local flings and hits he indulged in, created much amusement and good humor. To his surprise, for the tumbling on the previous evening had been execrably bad, "Master Harry" was called for, again and again. The Warbler sent for him, and the best of their usual programme was repeated.

The singing and acting brought such a flood of custom that Tanner and his assistants had, for the first time in months, more than they could attend to.

"I've struck it rich," he muttered, rubbing his hands and chuckling. "If I can keep Ware and his boy hyer through the summer I'll make a small fortune."

One of Tanner's assistants was an over-dressed young woman who answered to the name of Fanny Fulton. She was only in the saloon when there was an extraordinary run of business; therefore Ware had not seen her during the day.

At a late hour, when the singing had ended, he approached the bar, and, in his easy, self-possessed manner, drew her into conversation. Her every word and act showed that she imagined herself a gushing and attractive young creature. She posed and fidgeted, minced her words, and was evidently flattered by the attentions of the affable showman.

Why he was attracted toward her he would have found difficulty in explaining. Whatever beauty of feature she may have possessed was hidden or spoiled by a lavish use of cosmetics. Her plump figure was adorned with flashy colors, and her abundant masses of dark hair were combed high on her head and banged and frizzed in a most bewildering way. Some unerring instinct, however, led him to single her out.

"Mr. Ware, your singing is just too delicious!" she purred. "I was so charmed by it I could hardly wait on the customers. Such a thirsty crowd, too! It seemed they were thickest just when I most wanted to hear."

The little man almost swept the floor in the bow with which he acknowledged the compliment.

"The great bard has told us, Miss Fulton, that he who hath not music in his soul is fit for treason, stratagem and spoil. I sing a little, a very little! I have a brother, though, who warbles like an angel."

She giggled as if she considered it doubtful whether any one could sing better than the Warbler himself.

"Mr. Leonard, who was here earlier in the evening, paid you quite a compliment!" glancing at him demurely.

"Leonard!" and Ware started in spite of himself. "Oh, yes; I remember. Our friend Tanner gave me an introduction to-day. And what did Mr. Leonard say?"

"That you're so sharp nothing but a knife can cope with you."

The words seemed idle chatter, but when she had gone, Ware mused over them long and thoughtfully.

"Can it be that Leonard already suspects me?" he soliloquized. "I must find out if the two are intimate. There was surely a threat back of those words. 'Nothing but a knife can cope with me!' I don't suppose he would hesitate to use a knife to rid himself of an enemy. I must be extra cautious, or I'll tumble into some unexpected trouble."

CHAPTER III.

STRIKING THE TRAIL.

In their room that night the Warbler impressed upon his boy pard the necessity of shadowing the barmaid as well as Mr. Leonard.

The boy attempted it the next day, but found the task an exceedingly difficult one. She remained in her room much of the time, only descending to assist at the bar or pay hurried and surreptitious visits to various parts of the town. But "Master Harry" was a youth of much pertinacity, and his patience and watchfulness were finally rewarded.

The barmaid's room adjoined the apartments of Mr. Leonard, and certain acts tended to show she was his confidante and ally.

One evening, as she tripped down the stairway to assist Mr. Shelby Tanner in his arduous duties, a letter fluttered from her pocket and fell, unheeded by her, upon the lower landing. The quick eyes of the boy desisted it and noted its resting-place; and when she had passed on into the saloon he crept from his concealment and secured it.

A look of triumph strangely mingled with pain came into his face as he glanced at the superscription. The name was unknown to him, but the handwriting was perfectly familiar! Stowing the letter securely in an inner pocket he went at once in search of Mr. Ware.

That gentleman was entertaining Shelby Tanner with a dissertation on the peculiar qualities of mountain air in the development of brain power as attested by the intellectual citizens of Rocket Range. An almost imperceptible nod from the boy, however, caused him to drop the subject and wend his way to their room.

"Now, what is it?" he asked, when he had locked the door behind them. "I take it you have run against something of importance."

"Look at that!" he exclaimed, with quivering voice. "Miss Fulton dropped it as she went down the stairway, a little while ago."

The Warbler took the letter and stared curiously at the handwriting.

"You don't understand, I see! Of course, how should you? You can see that the letter is addressed to some young lady of this town, and the handwriting is my brother's!"

Ware now looked at the letter with real interest. It was addressed to Miss Maud Malcolm, and bore a date of some two months previous. Then he opened and read it, the boy looking over his shoulder and devouring the contents at the same time. It was simply a love missive, and revealed nothing but the fact that this Miss Maud Malcolm, whoever she was, was the writer's sweetheart. It was signed Lewis Cavendish.

"It don't tell much, but it tells a good deal that we didn't know or were uncertain of before. It proves that your brother was in this town some two months ago, and that while here he formed the acquaintance of this young lady. Who she is and whether she still remains in the town we must proceed to find out. It also

proves that we have not been wrong in suspecting the barmaid. I am beginning to think that, whatever John Leonard knows about this affair, she knows.

"How she came into possession of the letter, though, puzzles me. It may be that she or Leonard intercepted your brother's mail. Either that or she has stolen the letter from this Miss Malcolm. At any rate the post-mark shows that it had passed out of Lewis's hands."

After the night's performance he sounded Shelby Tanner on the subject now uppermost in his mind.

"This Miss Fulton is quite a jewel of a young lady and a great help to you!" he assured the barkeeper, at the same time seeming to give more attention to the building and balancing of a pyramid of glasses than to the words spoken. "It's a pity there aren't more such young ladies in the town. I don't suppose there are really a half-dozen young women in the entire camp."

Tanner's pride was touched, for the tones of the Warbler indicated an opinion that it was a great pity there were no more; and on a slight wager he ventured to name the unmarried women of the place:

"Well, there's Miss Fulton to start with. Then there's Miss Trueblood, what teaches the night school for miners; and Miss Jenks, an' Miss Stockton, an' the Holmes gals, three of 'em; an' Miss Malcolm, what lives on the hill over there, an' whose dad died last year, wuth quite a snug little fortune; an' Miss Brown, the clerk in the post office."

"That will do," laughed the Warbler, pushing the wagered coin toward Tanner. "You've won the bet. I'm glad to know that Rocket Range is even a better place than I thought it."

Then he drifted carelessly into a discussion of various commonplaces, and a half-hour later took his departure.

The next evening, when the shades of dusk were sufficiently heavy to screen his movements, he cautiously made his way to the house where Miss Malcolm was residing with an aged female relative.

He had, in the interval, picked up some further bits of information, and he trusted that an interview with the young lady would make clear many matters which were now locked in obscurity.

His dingy coat was brushed until it almost shone, and his worn shoes were polished till they gleamed like mirrors. He rung the bell, and spent the time of waiting in fluffing the frills of his shirt-front.

The ring was answered by the young lady, who, on hearing his request, led the way to the little parlor and stated that Miss Malcolm would be pleased to see him in a few moments.

"A snug cage," he thought, as he surveyed the room. "It must be a pretty bird that occupies it. It would be a go, now, if I should discover that she's the real cause of the young fellow's disappearance. There may have been a murderously inclined rival who put his bloody finger into the pie. I've heard of stranger things."

His cogitations were interrupted by the entrance of Miss Malcolm, a pretty young lady, but with a face that was rather pale and troubled.

The Warbler was on his feet instantly and greeted her with a bow of Chesterfieldian politeness.

"Pardon the intrusion, please," he apologized, feeling in his pocket for the letter. "This will serve to explain in part my mission. It was found by my *protege* Harry Cavendish."

A flush supplanted the pallor, and she sunk tremblingly into a chair, as she clutched the letter.

"Pray be seated," she said. "Did I understand you say Cavendish?"

He bowed affirmatively and resumed his seat. "The letter is, of course, your property, Miss Malcolm. I called to return it, to explain how it came into my possession, and to ask some questions."

He had been watching her narrowly without seeming to do so.

"I presume it was stolen from you. You may not know me, although I sent in my name. I am a sort of traveling showman, and for the present am singing nightly for the edification of the guests at Mr. Tanner's palatial establishment. I have some further credentials which I may present by and by. The letter was picked up by Master Harry Cavendish, on the lower landing of Tanner's stairway, where it had been dropped by a certain young woman named Fanny Fulton."

The later statement much astonished the young lady, as was evidenced by her looks.

"Surely, Mr. Ware, you must be mistaken. No, that isn't what I want to say. The circumstances appear to indicate that Miss Fulton pilfered the letter. I can hardly believe that. She has been here a number of times to obtain work and I never had occasion to suspect her. She must have carried it off accidentally in some clothing or dress material."

The Warbler had his own opinion as to that, but his facial expression showed only the greatest deference to the young lady's expressed belief.

"The presumption is great, Miss Malcolm," hesitating slightly and pulling at his tawny mustache, "that the boy, Harry Cavendish, is a brother of the young gentleman who wrote that letter. Following that presumption brought me here. I confess that a feeling stronger than curiosity led me to read the letter—a desire, in fact, to learn something concerning what we believe to be a great wrong."

While he was speaking, the young woman looked at him as if she would read his very thought.

"And you are seeking Lewis Cavendish? Trying to find what has become of him? Oh, Mr. Ware, can I trust you?"

"As you would trust yourself!" he assured her, earnestly. "Lewis Cavendish has mysteriously disappeared, and under circumstances indicating foul play. To find him if living, or to punish his murderers, if he is dead, is my sole purpose in visiting this country."

Her eyes lighted with hope.

"And you are a—a—?"

"Yes, Miss Malcolm; I am a detective!"

CHAPTER IV.

MUTUAL CONFIDENCES.

In admitting this the Warbler knew he risked much. He could not expect confessions from the young lady, however, without himself first making advances in that line. A study of her character, as revealed in her appearance and actions, had convinced him that in her keeping the secret would be safe. Her face was frank and open, and her clear blue eyes showed a pure and ingenuous mind. He felt that she was a woman who could be trusted; and who, if her confidence could be gained, would make a valuable ally.

"I suppose you know something of Lewis Cavendish's history?" he questioned, in a tone of growing familiarity.

"I know a little," she conceded. "But, it is only a little. If I had known more it might have been better, for then I could have formed some intelligent plan to work upon, when he disappeared."

"So, you have been making an attempt in the detective line?" with an encouraging smile.

"What I have done hardly deserves the name. I became acquainted with Mr. Cavendish through John Leonard, with whom my father had business dealings. The acquaintance ripened into warm friendship."

The blush which accompanied this confessed more than the words.

"Mr. Cavendish was thinking of buying some mining stock of Leonard. Suddenly he was missing from the town. After a week had gone by, without any letter or explanation, I went to Leonard, and was told that Lewis—I mean Mr. Cavendish—had returned East, without purchasing the property or stating the cause of his sudden departure."

"Mr. Leonard was very uneasy during the whole of the interview. I knew he was not telling the truth, and at once suspected foul play. But, I had no evidence on which to base a charge. Mr. Cavendish had told me his home was in Chicago, and I directed a letter to him there, but received no reply. I didn't know the number or the street. I wrote a second letter, using a return envelope, and it came back to me in about thirty days."

"Failing to obtain any trace of Mr. Cavendish in this way, I commenced to watch Leonard. It was about this time that I was thrown in contact with Miss Fulton. As her room was near Leonard's, I told her something of my story, and she promised to inform me of anything suspicious in his actions. That is all I have been able to do, and that has amounted to nothing."

The detective on dropping his disguise had discarded his air of oily affability. For a time after the story was finished he sat with brows contracted and an expression of deep thoughtfulness on his mobile face.

"There can be no doubt," he said at last, "that some crime has been committed by Leonard or his agents. It may not be murder. In fact, I hardly think it is; though I must admit circumstances point that way."

"As you have so kindly told me all you know about the mysterious affair, and as our interests seem to be identical, I cannot be less frank. Three or four months ago Lewis Cavendish left his home in Chicago with a man whom I now know to be John Leonard, of this place. For several weeks letters were received regularly by Cavendish's relatives, whose names are Upton. Then they suddenly and strangely ceased."

"The young man had but recently reached his majority and come into the inheritance of a considerable fortune. About that time he made the acquaintance of Leonard, who, from what I can learn, represented himself as a Western capitalist, engaged largely in mining and speculating."

"Cavendish did not reside with his relatives, but had taken rooms down town; and here Leonard frequently visited him. Hence it happened that none of the relatives ever saw Leonard, except Cavendish's younger brother, Harry, who was in the habit of calling at his brother's rooms on his way from school. Even he did not know Leonard's name. For some reason, however, he did not like the looks of the stranger, and so was drawn to observe him more closely than he otherwise might have done."

"One evening Lewis Cavendish told his brother to inform the folks, meaning the Uptons, that he was going West to look at some mining property which he thought of purchasing. Leonard was in the room when he made the statement; and Harry now remembers, though he thought little of it at the time, that he made some remark which suddenly changed the drift of the conversation. But for that Lewis might have revealed his point of destination, and thus saved us much worry and work."

He ceased for a moment and looked earnestly at Miss Malcolm; then questioned:

"Has Leonard been in the habit of wearing a full beard?"

The query was evidently a surprising one.

"Never, since I have known him."

"And that has been how long?"

"Two years at the least!"

"I suspected as much. While in Chicago, according to Harry's statement, he wore a full beard. I take it he wasn't away from here long enough to have grown it?"

She replied in the negative.

"I am getting ahead of my story, however," and he smiled faintly. "The suspicion suddenly recurred to me and I could not forbear putting it into words. I will return to it in a little while. Now, with your permission, we will go back to Chicago."

"When the long silence of young Cavendish began to create suspicion, I was consulted. I talked with Harry, and was convinced there was something seriously wrong. The letters received by the Uptons were all postmarked 'Cheyenne,' and appeared to have been written from that place. A close examination of them, however, showed that the name of the town had been removed with acids from the headings of the letters and Cheyenne substituted."

"The Cheyenne postmark was of course genuine, and it was the only clue we had. It was evident to my mind that Cavendish had fallen into the hands of a sharper, who was taking every means to conceal his steps; and that he had, in some way, induced the young man to allow him to mail the letters, and that instead of mailing them at the place where they were written he had conveyed or forwarded them to Cheyenne."

"There were other circumstances tending to show foul play. Young Cavendish started West with a considerable sum of money and a draft for fifty thousand dollars. It was easy to discover that the draft had been cashed in Cheyenne by Cavendish himself. His was the only indorsement on it, and it had been left with the Cheyenne Bank until they could assure themselves of the genuineness of his signature."

"With these few clues I started from Chicago for the West, taking the boy, Harry, with me. This was necessary, for he was the only member of the family who had seen the man with whom his brother had departed."

"On reaching Cheyenne I visited the bank where the draft had been cashed. The large amount called for by the draft had fixed in the minds of the bank officials the circumstances under which it had been paid. Their books, of course, showed the record of the transaction, but that would have been of little benefit to me if their memories had failed them."

"Their statements made it certain that Lewis Cavendish had come to the bank with a stranger; that he had deposited the draft, in lieu of identification, and had returned for the money within a week or ten days."

"Here the trail ended. I quickly ascertained he was not in the town, and then began planning a way to discover his whereabouts. If we could only find the stranger with whom he had left Chicago we would then have a point from which to work."

"After much thought I hit upon a plan. It was extremely simple, but the best we could do. I am considered a fair singer, and can perform a few ordinary tricks of sleight-of-hand. The boy had attained some little dexterity at a gymnasium; so we started out as itinerant showmen."

"By strolling in this guise from town to town, and from camp to camp, we hoped to discover the mysterious stranger, or come upon some trace of the missing young man. Showmen do not often visit these out-of-the-way, mountain places; hence we were reasonably sure our efforts in that line, feeble though they were, would draw together all classes and conditions of men."

"For nearly a month we wandered about in this vagrant way. Then we struck Rocket Range and Harry discovered our man in the audience. You know the rest, or most of it."

"The man proved to be John Leonard. He did not wholly answer to Harry's description of the stranger he had seen in Chicago. That man had a full beard, while Leonard wears only a mustache. The boy insists, however, that Leonard is the man."

"The beard worn in Chicago was doubtless a false one. My theory is that before he reached this place he removed it; and explained the change to young Cavendish by saying he had visited a barber-shop and had been shaved."

Miss Malcolm had listened with deep interest to the detective's story.

"Have you any further plans?" she asked.

"Only undeveloped ones, and liable to be changed at any moment. In a case of this kind it is difficult to form plans ahead. We have to be guided by circumstances."

"There is one thing, though," and he looked at her closely, "Miss Fulton is no friend of yours, whatever she professes. I have seen enough to convince me that she is leagued with Leonard, and is altogether a wicked and dangerous woman."

Miss Malcolm seemed pained by this frank statement.

"Understanding my connection with the case you will pardon me, I know, for what may appear to you a harsh judgment. We, Harry and I, have been shadowing Miss Fulton, and our discoveries prove my assertions."

"And you would advise me to have nothing more to do with her?"

"Hardly that. She would suspect something. I only want to put you on your guard against her. I am sure her visits here have been in Leonard's interest."

"And I told her almost everything!" Miss Malcolm interjected. "Surely she cannot be so base as you think!"

"We will let time determine that; but, as you value the life and well-being of Lewis Cavendish, do not breathe a word to her of what we have discussed this evening. I am certain Leonard would know it within an hour, and my best efforts would thus be thwarted."

"A little while ago you spoke of plans. A part of them, at least, will be the shadowing of Miss Fulton. In this you can assist. Watch her words and actions when she calls on you, and try to ascertain her real motive in making the calls. You can speak to her in a general way of John Leonard and Mr. Cavendish. By so doing you may lead her into some slip of the tongue that will reveal matters of importance."

"Above all, however, be watchful of your own statements and admissions. Remember that while you are trying to sound her she is probably attempting the same thing with you."

He looked at the little clock that ticked energetically on the mantel.

"I see I must be going. It is about time for the commencement of my performance at Tanner's. I must keep my engagements, for the good of our cause, if not for the sake of the salary. I will try to call on you or advise you of the progress of affairs. If you learn anything of importance send for me at once."

He bowed himself out, and, a little later, was slipping by obscure by-paths back to the roystering and the garish lights at Tanner's.

CHAPTER V.

A WOULD-BE SUITOR.

ON reaching the saloon he found that Harry had a valuable bit of information to impart.

"I have been watching Miss Fulton!" the boy

whispered, drawing the Warbler into the dark recesses of the side street. "She is acquainted with the old chap, as sure as you live. I saw her in his room awhile ago while he was away. Just then a servant came along with a pitcher of water, and saw her, too. Miss Fulton seemed to take back a little by this."

"Where is Mr. Leonard?" she asked. You know what a high, squeaky voice she has, Mr. Ware! and the boy gave a ludicrous imitation of it.

"Well, she said it just that way:

"Where is Mr. Leonard?"

"I don't know," said the servant, kind of surprised like. "Did you want to see him per-ticklar, ma'am?"

"No—er, that is, not especially. You may tell him, though, if you see him, that I called to borrow one of his books."

"That's just what she said, Mr. Ware, when I don't believe Mr. Leonard has a book in his apartments. I'm sure she didn't have any in her hands, nor she didn't go back to get any."

"And what do you make of it?" the Warbler questioned.

"That she was there to get orders about something, or to tell him something."

"And where is she now?"

"I don't know," the boy reluctantly confessed. "She skipped down-stairs, and when I followed I couldn't find her. You see the servant hung around in the hall there for five minutes or more, and I didn't dare to creep out."

"And you haven't seen anything of Leonard?"

"Not a sign. I am beginning to think he suspicious us. I can see him once in awhile, but he has kept awful shady, for some reason."

"You must be extra careful," the detective cautioned. "It won't do to let him find out who we are at this stage of the game. I can tell from his looks that he's as quick as a steel-trap. The least carelessness on our part may ruin everything."

"The reason I speak of this is that I noticed your wig awry when we turned in here a little while ago. If he had seen that he would have had cause to suspect us. With your darkened complexion and that wig he will never guess that you are the boy he saw in Chicago, unless you heedlessly betray yourself."

"Well, the thing is so plaguey hard to keep on!" the boy grumbled, twisting the wig into place.

Then he crept from the shadows of the side street by a rear route, and the detective went on into the saloon.

When the singing commenced, a half-hour later, the barmaid was in her usual place.

At the end of the performance the Warbler again sought an interview with her.

"As bright and sprightly as ever!" he flatteringly asserted, giving her a cajoling glance. "Methinks the very birds would become envious, only that the said birds don't chirp around after nightfall."

"Some of them do, Mr. Ware. There's the owl and the night-hawk, for instance."

"To neither of which class can you be compared. I have heard you sing; and if the recollections of the old boyhood days on the farm are not misleading, the creatures you mention are not gifted in that line."

In making this assertion he drew largely on his fancy. He had never heard Miss Fulton sing, though he had heard her make some squeaking attempts thereat.

She looked him squarely in the eyes.

"Mr. Ware, do you want to know what I think of you?"

"Certainly!" with a deferential smile.

"That if a contest of sweet-talking frauds was got up you'd be sure to win the blue ribbon."

He laughed, apparently regarding the thrust as a compliment.

"You wouldn't say that to John Leonard," he averred.

"Wouldn't I? Well, then, it's because he isn't such a palaverer. But why do you mention him in that connection?"

He saw that she was intently studying his face.

"Faint rumor has whispered into my shell-like ear that he is somewhat sweet on you!" he ventured, striking out boldly.

"I hope you won't go and sing that to the public!" gasping the words as if the assertion had startled her. "Yes, John Leonard and I are very good friends, but not in the way you seem to think."

"Hit 'er ag'in!" Tanner laughed; for, now that the crowd was thinning out, he found time hanging rather idly on his hands and strained an ear to catch a sentence now and then. "If John

Leonard ain't sweet on her I don't know who air. She was chattin' to him fer nighabout an hour, this evenin'."

"I hope Mr. Tanner is a humorous falsifier," the Warbler declared serenely. "If he isn't, my cake is still in the flour-barrel. I suppose, though, the field is open, and I'm at liberty to cut him out, if I can."

"If you kin? That's good!" guffawed Tanner. "I'll bet this gold mine ag'in' a wuthless hole in the ground, how's'ever, that you can't do anything of the kind."

Miss Fulton attempted a blush, but the paint was too thick to reveal any heightening of color.

"You men are all alike," she simpered. "If a girl speaks to a gentleman, a wedding is announced forthwith. As I told you, Mr. Leonard and I are very good friends, that is all."

"Then I'll not have to go out and shoot myself because of a broken heart!" the Warbler exclaimed, airily. "I was afraid such might be my awful fate. If the field is open, I hurl my lance into the arena and give notice to John Leonard and the rest of mankind that I shall enter the lists."

Few young women of the caliber of Fanny Fulton but would be flattered and pleased by the manner in which he said this. It told in language plainer than words that his heart had been touched by her beauty and wit.

"By the way, what has become of Leonard?" he questioned, pulling, as was his reflective habit, at his mustache.

Miss Fulton started, and again eyed him closely. Evidently this frequent recurrence to Leonard began to arouse her suspicions.

"In his room or on the streets, I suppose!" with a noticeable sharpness in the words. "You seem very much interested in Mr. Leonard."

"Naturally!" and he oilily rubbed his hands. "I didn't know but he might suddenly come gunning for a canary of about my build. That would be awkward, you know, and unpleasant."

Then dropping his bantering tone for one more serious:

"I'm really more than half in earnest in what I've said, Miss Fulton. I fancy we might think more of each other on a closer acquaintance. I must admit I haven't much wealth; but wealth isn't everything, even in the Wild West. With your consent, I'd like to cultivate your friendship. Who knows but it might result in something warmer?"

She smiled a consent; and the Warbler, lifting her hand to his lips, politely bowed himself away.

CHAPTER VI.

ANOTHER LETTER.

Two days later, Warbling William received a message from Miss Maud Malcolm, stating that she urgently wished to see him. The message which was written, was borne by a miner who had been hired by Miss Malcolm to deliver it. It gave no explanation of the cause of the sudden summons.

The pseudo-showman waited only until the darkness would conceal his movements and then set out for Miss Malcolm's residence, which was too conspicuously situated on a hill to suit his crafty purposes.

He found her pacing restlessly up and down the narrow limits of the little parlor. She had apparently been waiting; and his coming seemed a great relief.

The Warbler's mind was cast in almost too suspicious a mold, or it may be that this constant shadowing of questionable characters had given a twist to his imagination. At any rate the unwelcome and unbidden thought came that he had seen actresses tread the boards of the mimic stage in much the same way. A look at her face, however, banished the unpleasant suggestion.

"Oh, I am so glad you have come!" she exclaimed, in an agitated voice. "It seems ages since I sent for you. I have received a letter which has set me half wild."

"More letters!" thought the Warbler, that odd suspicion again coming to him. "It looks like this is to be a letter case all through."

"It's from him!" she said, placing the closely-written page in the detective's hands. "We must do something to relieve him. Do you think it would be advisable to call in the aid of the officers?"

She checked herself, as if realizing that he did not yet know the letter's purport.

The Warbler deftly smoothed the page and spread it on his knee. The handwriting corresponded with that in the love note found by the boy, and the contents were as follows:

"IN THE JIM CROW MINE, date unknown,

"MY DEAR MAUD:—I have succeeded in tribing the miner who waits on me, to furnish me with writing material and deliver into your hands what I may write. I am held a close prisoner in an abandoned chamber of the Jim Crow Mine. How long I have been held here I don't know, for I have lost all track of time. I feel that if I remain here much longer I shall go crazy. The darkness and loneliness and the torture of mind I have suffered are killing me. No doubt Leonard has explained to you my absence in some way not greatly to my credit. I was assaulted and robbed by a man whom I now suspect to have been one of his tools. I was rendered unconscious by a blow on the head, and when I recovered I found myself here. Send some one to my rescue. I am in the abandoned chamber leading north from the shaft. I haven't time nor space to write more.

"Faithfully and lovingly yours.

"LEWIS CAVENDISH."

"You are certain the letter was written by Mr. Cavendish?" he asked, looking up from the page.

"I know it!" she assured him. "There can be no doubt that Lewis wrote it. And to think he has been held all these weeks in that terrible place! I can't rest nor sleep until something is done to relieve him."

She again paced nervously up and down the room as she had been doing when he entered.

"I don't think it would be advisable to call in the officers," he said. "Leonard is no doubt hand in glove with them, and warning would be given before we could do anything."

"You intend to go alone, then?" stopping in her walk and looking at him with big, wet eyes.

He nodded assent.

"Oh, Mr. Ware, would it be possible for me to go with you? It don't seem to me that I can stand it to remain inactive while Lewis is in such need of aid. If I could just go along to see and hear, even if I could be of no assistance!"

"I am sorry, Miss Malcolm," with a pitying glance. "But I fear I wouldn't be justified in granting your request. A worn-out chamber of the Jim Crow Mine is doubtless a dark and dismal hole, with many dangers to be overcome in reaching it. Then, there is another reason for the refusal: It may be easier to get in there than to get out; and if I go some one may have to come after me."

"So, you see, it is important that I leave a friend behind. Harry is smart, but he is only a boy. I shall tell him to call on you if I do not return within a certain period, and together you must put into effect some plan to rescue me."

"Should you hear nothing from either of us within two days, call on the mayor and insist on having the mine searched."

"Why not do that now?"

"As I said, I am afraid we should flush the game by doing so. I want to fasten my grip on John Leonard, if possible. If I do not come back, though, there is nothing else you can do but seek the assistance of the officers."

He refolded the letter and placed it in his pocket.

"With your permission I should like to retain this," apologetically. "It may come handy, by and by, for we never know what may happen."

"When will you start?" she queried, anxiously.

"Just as soon as I can. To-night, at all events. Don't agitate yourself, Miss Malcolm, more than you can help. I will report at once on my return; and I trust I may be able to bring Mr. Cavendish with me."

She followed him, weeping, to the door, as he quitted the house.

"Of course I was foolish in suspecting her," he thought, as he slipped, fox-like, back to Tanner's. "I have been led into traps so often, though, that I reckon my wariness is excusable. If young Cavendish is held in the mine—and there can be no doubt of it, I think—I ought to be able to release him by a little stratagem."

So busy with his thoughts was he that he almost ran over the boy, who was waiting for him at the street corner.

"The cops will pull you in if you go to falling over people that way!" Harry warned, with a grin. "I've been watching the old man like a hawk, as you told me to. But he's always too much for me, some way. Just when I think I'm looking at him, I find him gone! The Irishman's flea couldn't hold a candle to him."

"Come up to the room!" Ware whispered. "I have something we'll want to talk over."

When they were safe in their own apartment and screened from all observers he handed the boy the letter.

"What do you make of it?" he asked, watching the play of surprise, wonder and anger on the boy's expressive features.

"That old Leonard ought to be lynched!" was the emphatic declaration. "We must find Lew at once. I know where the shaft of the Jim Crow Mine is. It ain't a mile from this very place. The scoundrel, to keep any one in a hole like that!"

But, what do you make of the handwriting?"

"Oh, that! That's Lew's, sure! I could swear to it anywhere."

"Then I'll go!" and the detective breathed a sigh of relief.

"And I'll go!" with eyes flashing. "If your brother was in a fix like that, you wouldn't stay back for anybody, would you?"

"No, perhaps not. But, circumstances are said to alter cases."

"Oh, you must let me go, Mr. Ware. I can't—I can't stay behind!"

The Warbler found it impossible to resist the boy's pleading.

"Be ready then when the show is over. We will start as soon as the bulk of the crowd is gone. Now, leave me alone, while I try to figure out a plan for getting into the mine."

And the boy tripped down-stairs, his mind so whirling that it is doubtful if he would have recognized John Leonard or Fanny Fulton had they passed him.

CHAPTER VII.

"DOWN IN A COAL-MINE."

HARRY had been gone but a few moments, when Ware proceeded to disguise himself by changing his clothing and donning a bushy, tawny beard that well matched the color of his mustache. The articles were obtained from a rusty-looking grip-sack which he had brought with him to Rocket Range.

The change thus effected was so great that his most intimate acquaintances would scarcely have recognized him. When he had locked his dingy cutaway and other ordinary apparel in the receptacle from which the others had been taken, he surveyed himself in the oblong mirror that hung against the wall.

"Not a bad get-up," was his muttered comment. "Methinks if the fair Fanny should clap her peepers on me at this instant she would tumble head over heels in love with yours truly. That girl has a fund of information that would be invaluable to me. Whether I can succeed in extracting it is another thing. She's as shrewd and wary as a professional. What a pard she would make in the detective line!"

After a few further disguising touches he extinguished the dimly burning lamp, opened the door slightly and peered into the hall to see that the coast was clear. No one was in sight; and he crept softly into the street.

His usual evening performance did not begin till nearly ten o'clock. He had visited Miss Malcolm immediately after nightfall, and had spent about half an hour in talking with Harry and in changing his garments. Hence he had abundant time for the work in hand, which was the securing of miners' suits for himself and Harry.

The thronged streets were fairly well lighted; but, with a soft hat pulled far over his eyes, he boldly made his way along them. On reaching an obscure part of the town he entered a little store where miners' supplies and outfits were sold.

The proprietor bustled briskly forward, scenting a sale; and the Warbler was soon in possession of the needed articles, lanterns included.

On his return to Tanner's, he regained his room in the same cautious way, divested himself of his disguises, and was once more the smiling and affable gentleman of the song and guitar.

Shortly after midnight, when he was again at liberty, he once more ascended to his room, this time taking Harry with him.

"Now, slip into that suit," he said, when he had screened the light and turned it so low that the place was filled with somber shadows. "It may be a little large for you, but it is the smallest I could find. Work lively, too, for we've got to get into that mine in some way before daylight."

Just then a step was heard in the hall and operations were for a time suspended. Ware had taken his usual precaution of leaving the key in the lock, however, and he had little fear that prying eyes could see them. But the foot-steps halted only temporarily, and the changing of clothing was resumed.

Within ten minutes what seemed to be two miners emerged from the lower hallway and strode down the street. There was nothing in this to create suspicion had they been seen, for a number of miners roomed together in the hotel.

When they had traversed some distance they

took to dark side streets and alleys, and after much winding and turning left the town behind them.

"I don't hardly know how we're going to work this," the Warbler whispered, when the black dump-pile of the Jim Crow Mine loomed before them. "There is a day and a night shift of workmen, and if we had been here when the shifts were changed the thing would have been easy enough. We could have entered the mine with the night shift without much danger of detection."

A lantern gleamed here and there about the dump-pile and the mouth of the shaft; and as they drew near they could hear the voices of men.

"I don't suppose it would be worth while to reveal ourselves and try to deceive them in any way. They know about who has business in the mine at this time of night and who hasn't."

Just then a little car containing coal was hoisted from the shaft and run out upon a small tramway leading to an elevator from which the coal was to be loaded into railway cars for shipment.

The incident gave the detective an idea which held some promise.

"Come!" he whispered, giving the boy's coat a tug, and sinking noiselessly to the earth. "We'll try the weasel game. If we can sneak into one of those little cars we'll go down the shaft a-rolling."

With movements as silent as those of the animal he had mentioned they approached the timbers about the mouth of the shaft. While crouching expectantly another car came up and was run upon the tramway. It was filled with coal, and on top of the heap was a numbered paddle showing to what miner's account the delving should be credited.

These cars were ascending and descending almost constantly, and, after an hour's watching, an opportunity presented for slipping into one that was going down. The attention of the workmen was drawn elsewhere for a few minutes, and when the car was lowered it bore the singing detective and his boy pard into the depths of the mine.

Here detection seemed inevitable. When the door of the cage opened the lamp of the workman below pierced the gloom and revealed their presence.

"Seems to me you fellows air' thunderin' late in gittin' down!" he growled. "You won't make enough to-night to pay ye fer yer trouble o' comin'."

Ware was quick to comprehend the situation. The miner took them for belated workmen who had probably been delayed by some drunken carousal.

"Better late'n never," he answered, with disguised and thickened utterance. "Couldn't git hyer no quicker. High ole time with some 'f the boys, you bet!"

"You're one of the new men, I reckon, an' I'd advise ye to hustle to yer work quick's ye kin. Ef the foreman gits wind of it, he'll be mighty likely to lay ye off."

Ware and Harry stumbled past him before he had finished speaking, and hurried on into the gloom. They could see lights twinkling here and there, and hear the tread of mules and rumble of wheels where the little trains of coal cars were being brought in from the converging tunnels and chambers.

"In the abandoned chamber north is where your brother is held, if there is any truth in that letter!" said the detective, stopping and trying to locate himself. "I'm half turned round already. If we only knew the outs and ins of this place we'd have plainer sailing. Before we go any further, though, we'd better light these lamps. There may be danger from damp away from the mouth of the shaft."

The fact that the miner had not commented on their unlighted lanterns convinced him it would be perfectly safe to strike a match there.

When they were again ready to advance, they turned sharply toward the north, and soon found themselves among cobwebbed and dusty debris, showing that that portion of the mine had been worked out and abandoned. Then they came to a tunnel-like opening, braced with rotting timbers, which seemed to be the passage leading to the chamber mentioned in the letter.

Harry, by this time, was becoming so excited he could hardly contain himself. He believed they were now within a few feet of his brother's terrible prison.

"I can't imagine what kind of a place he is held in," said the detective, as they picked their way forward. "The chamber must be fitted up with a door, or something to turn it into a prison. The more I think of it the more in-

definite seem the statements made in that letter."

They had advanced but a few yards when they came upon indications of the recent use of pick and drill.

"That looks a little like we may be approaching a part of the mine that is still worked. It may be we have taken the wrong passage. I didn't see any other, though, and we'll go on till we find out where this leads to."

He paid small heed to the drill-marks, not considering them of much significance. He had cause to think of this afterward, however, and to regret his inattention.

The passage widened as they progressed, and the walls began to stretch away on either hand, inclosing an area of unknown extent. There were timber braces here and there; and in addition to these, columns of rock and solid coal had been left by the workmen to support the heavy mass of earth and stone above. In the dim and uncertain light of their lanterns these pillars seemed to divide the vast space into winding and colonnaded aisles.

"There's just about two chances to one that we'll get lost in here!" Ware observed, as he endeavored to pierce the murky darkness. "I can fancy it wouldn't be pleasant if I should. There hasn't been any work done in here for a long time, and we might wander around for days without being able to find our way out or make ourselves heard."

"Don't you think we ought to be close to where Lew is, now?" Harry anxiously questioned.

"Yes, my boy, I have been thinking that we ought, if he's in here. It looks a little like we've been sent on a wild-goose chase."

"Maybe we could find out where he is by calling to him!"

"And maybe we'd bring the miners down on us! Let us look a little further first."

They were on the point of again advancing when a rumbling and muffled report came from the passage they had recently quitted. The stout pillars about them shook as if disturbed by an earthquake and a blinding cloud of dust was driven in upon them. This was accompanied by a crash as if the walls behind them had fallen in.

"My God!" the detective exclaimed, a perceptible tremor in his voice. "A blast has been fired in the passage, and we are blocked in!"

CHAPTER VIII.

IMPRISONED.

ENTOMBED alive! The thought is sufficient to appall the stoutest heart. The detective sunk tremblingly upon his knees as the dreadful suspicion flashed through his mind, and Harry dropped beside him, half-sobbing with fright.

"It may not be as bad as we think it is, Harry!" straightening up as he noticed the boy's terror. "The passage may not be blocked at all, though it did sound like the walls had tumbled in. There is no need to give up till we know the worst."

He shuddered, even while forcing these hopeful words through his lips.

The rush of dust-laden air had not extinguished their lanterns; and they quickly made their way back to the narrow passage. Here Ware found his gravest suspicions confirmed. The end of the passage nearest the shaft had been blotted out, and only a wall of crushed rock and pulverized coal showed where it had been.

"We're trapped!" the detective gasped, when their lamps revealed the desperateness of their situation. "Unless there's another passage we'll never get out of here alive."

In this moment of extreme terror the heroism of the boy's soul was brought out. The flash of his eyes was undaunted, and though his pallid lips quivered, they only opened to speak words of encouragement:

"I've heard you say, Mr. Ware, that as long as there's life there is hope. We didn't go into the chamber but a little way. There may be plenty of other tunnels by which we can get out. We'll not give up until we have tried every plan. I don't suppose there could be a hope of blasting a way through with the powder in your cartridges?"

The cheering tones acted like a tonic on the detective's dazed faculties.

"You are right!" he asserted. "It's foolish to give way to despair. The whole black scheme flashed over me in a minute, though, and I acknowledge that for a little while I was completely unnerved."

He had lifted himself and was now looking the boy earnestly in the face.

"What scheme?" Harry questioned, not comprehending the drift of the statement.

"Sit down here and I will tell you," said Ware, drawing him to a seat at his side. "I don't feel strong enough to go on, yet, and it will do me good to talk to you. Besides, you might as well know what I think, first as last. You're a boy of sense and courage, and together we can perhaps determine whether I am right or wrong."

With wonder-filled eyes the boy knelt by him. "It came upon me like an inspiration, Harry! And for a cunningly devised scheme it goes ahead of anything I ever dreamed of. While we have been planning and working we have allowed ourselves to be made the tools and playthings of John Leonard and his pals!"

"You remember when you found the letter in the hallway! That letter led me to visit Miss Malcolm; and out of it grew the chain of events which has placed us here. Miss Malcolm, like the bar-maid, is only one of Leonard's decoys! That letter, seemingly in your brother's handwriting, led me to reveal everything to her. Like the poor fool I was I told her what had brought us here and what we hoped to accomplish."

"I am now satisfied that every word I uttered was rehearsed to John Leonard within the hour. Then he began to plan to get us into his power."

"But the handwriting!" Harry objected. "That was Lew's—I know it was Lew's!"

"You thought it was, and so did I. But, we were deceived, Harry! Basely deceived! The letters, both of them, were forgeries. Leonard doubtless intercepted your brother's mail and obtained specimens of his handwriting. The rest would be an easy matter to a skilled penman."

Harry shook his head; but the detective did not heed him and went on:

"Then the alleged message from this mine was constructed, with hellish ends in view. I shall never forgive myself for not looking more closely into Miss Malcolm's antecedents. I believe, too, since this happened, that Shelby Tanner is another one of Leonard's tools. All I knew of Miss Malcolm I gathered from him. It may be that Leonard suspected us from the very first. If so, it shows how shrewd he really is; for the engagement of our services by Tanner would assist in putting us in Leonard's power."

"The entire plan: the allurements of your brother from Chicago, and his robbery in this wild region; the masterly way in which we have been led on into self-entanglement; and our imprisonment here, all showing that we have been contending with as cunning a knave as ever went unhung."

"You see, Harry, if we should meet our death here, no one could be legally charged with having conspired against us. We sneaked in here like thieves in the night and entered this chamber. No one knew we were in here, and a blast was fired—a very common thing in a coal mine. And so we were unwittingly shut in, and became victims of our own heedlessness. It's a masterly plan, Harry; conceived by the very king of schemers."

Ware was so absorbed in working out this conception of the case that he almost forgot the painful effect it might have on the boy's mind. He forgot, too, that he had set out to talk the matter over and gain the boy's opinion. He was recalled to a consideration of what he was doing by Harry's startled exclamation:

"Oh, Mr. Ware, it surely can't be so bad as that! I can't think that we're not to get out of here?"

"Did I say that?" and the detective started. "If I did, I wish to recall it. We will get out of here! We must! There's too much depending on us, to think of surrendering at this point."

He grasped the wall with one hand, and drew himself from his recumbent position.

"If we'd shout together, as loud as we can, maybe we'd be heard," Harry suggested.

The plan seemed worth trying; and with united voices they made the low arches ring. But, not a sound came from the direction of the shaft, and only reverberating echoes from the gloomy aisles of the chamber. Then Ware fired shot after shot from his revolver, with the same discouraging effect.

"It's no use trying further!" he declared. "We're only wasting time here. We must endeavor to explore every cranny of this place while the lamps hold out."

He started off in the direction they had gone before, Harry following close by at his heels. The chamber was not nearly so large as they had supposed, and they soon came upon a wall of solid rock blocking further progress in that way. At this they turned about and for a long time wandered aimlessly under the low arches.

"I thought I heard water!" Harry asserted, stopping and clutching the detective's arm. "There it is again. It sounds like a running stream!"

Plainly now to their ears came the low gurgling of a flowing current chafing over a rocky bed; and they hurried forward with excited cries. In a little while the earth beneath them became moist and slippery, and the gleam of their lanterns revealed a rapid stream. It was ten or twelve feet wide, and flowed with a strong motion that indicated considerable depth.

"Where this comes in we may be able to get out," said Ware, looking earnestly at the water. "There must be a rift in the wall. We'll go back and see."

The suggestion was full of hope; and with quickened steps and throbbing hearts they hurried up the little stream. But their hopes were dashed in pieces when they reached the point whence it emerged into the chamber. With a sullen and subdued roar it rushed with great speed out of a circular opening in the rock, which it almost completely filled.

"Looks like an aqueduct?" Harry averred, striving to conceal his disappointment. "That would be a great thing for some cities I know of."

"Yes, it would!" giving him an approving glance. "We'll try the other end of the chamber. Perhaps we'll have better luck there. There's surely another opening into this place besides the one by which we entered."

Yet, though his words were somewhat buoyant his heart was far otherwise. He could not think that Leonard would entrust them in a place from which there was the slightest chance of escape.

They had now been a number of hours in the chamber, and had explored a large portion of it. Almost hopelessly he began to retrace his way down the stream. Their gait was a slippery scramble and their progress slow, but they reached the other end in a comparatively short time.

Here they were again doomed to disappointment. With a hollow roar the stream flowed under the wall and disappeared, fretted and chafed by the rocks until its surface at the point of contact was a swirling mass of foam. Evidently the volume of water was so great at times that it could not escape fast enough through the orifice. This was attested by the deposit of drift and silt high on the walls, and the extensive surface covered by glutinous slime.

"We can't get out here!" Ware observed, dubiously. "We'll have to cross the stream and see if there is anything beyond."

"Sounds like the water is going straight down into the earth!" asserted Harry, who was climbing over the muddy rocks to get a better view of the opening.

Just then he gave a sharp cry. He had lost his balance. The next moment he fell headlong into the yeasty current and was swept from sight.

CHAPTER IX.

FREEDOM REGAINED.

THE detective shouted warningly as he saw Harry topple; but the warning was given too late, and he could only stare blankly and despairingly at the spot where he had last seen his boy pard.

"He is gone!" he whispered, hoarsely. "Gone! Gone!"

For the moment it seemed he contemplated a mad leap into the stream. He took one quick step forward; then restrained himself with an effort.

"Perhaps it's better so! Better a quick death by drowning than hours of torture and starvation. The end would have been the same. We could never have escaped from here."

He sunk dejectedly upon a stone, heedless of the slime which coated it, and stared moodily into the somber current. Suddenly he was aroused by a tapping on the wall, and a muffled shout. He looked at the place from whence the sounds came, feeling almost that his brain was turning and his irresponsible fancy had commenced to play him tricks.

But the sounds came again. A sharp tapping as if with a stone or some other hard substance, and then apparently far-away calls:

"Oh, Mr. Ware! Oh, Mr. Ware!"

The detective started to his feet and bent eagerly forward.

"Surely, surely, that was Harry's voice! Can it be he escaped in some strange way?"

The calls continued; and he answered them with a shout that thrilled and rung like a trumpet blast.

"I'm in here!" came the response. "There's

another chamber here. The water carried me under the wall, and then I crawled out. I am sound as a top. The wall isn't very thick, and the water rises again on this side of it."

This certain knowledge that Harry had escaped death so inspirited Ware that he laughed and shouted by turns, and seemed as enthusiastic as if all their troubles had found an easy solution.

Without a moment's hesitation he leaped blindly into the stream, feeling sure that as it had borne Harry safely into the chamber beyond he could trust himself within the grasp of its whirling waters. The plunge carried him to the rocky bottom; but he was a strong, buoyant swimmer and came again to the surface without much difficulty. As he did so he heard a cheery shout and the words:

"Got through all right, eh? I was 'most afraid you wouldn't try it."

It was so pitchy dark he could see nothing, for of course they now had no lights. But he turned energetically toward the voice, and by a few sturdy strokes reached the bank. Harry's hand was on his shoulder as he landed.

"I can't see you very well, but I heard you snort like a sea-horse when you came up, and knew you had made it. I am getting a little used to the dark, though, and can distinguish objects better than at first. This is a poky place in here, but finding it makes me think there is a way out. Anything is better than wandering around the way we've been doing."

He was chattering like a magpie, though his teeth were knocking together like castanets.

"Cool as the rivers that flow from Greenland's icy mountains!" Ware shivered, scrambling to his feet and giving himself a dog-like shake. "We'll have to squeeze the water out of these wet clothes or we'll freeze."

Harry grasped him by the hand and led the way to where the floor was comparatively dry and warm. Here they managed to wring most of the water out of their garments and felt much better therefor.

"It seems almost a miracle, the way you were preserved!" Ware said, reverently. "When you tumbled into that stream I thought I had seen the last of you."

"I wasn't feeling extra good about that time, myself!" and the boy attempted a laugh. "But we're both of us sound as new dollars, yet. I fancy we are at least as well off as we were in the other chamber. If we can't do anything else we can follow on down the stream and take another header. The water's bound to come out somewhere."

He had no such reckless intentions, but cheery talk made him feel more hopeful.

"Now, we'll see what we can do!" and Ware laid his hand against the wall. "We'll follow this wall until we can go no further. Like you, I feel that your little misadventure is to prove our salvation. I'll go first; and be careful how you step."

He then advanced at as brisk a pace as was possible under the circumstances. When they had gone a few hundred yards he halted and bent forward in a listening attitude.

"Did you hear anything?" he questioned.

For a moment they stood breathless and with ears strained to catch the slightest sound. Then there came a subdued and metallic "chink, chink!" like the noise made by a miner's pick striking against stone.

"Hurrah!" Harry shouted. "We're saved! We're saved! I do believe we're saved!" and he ran forward almost dragging the detective from his feet.

"Be careful!" the latter cautioned. "You may stumble into a hole."

Notwithstanding this warning he hurried after with a haste that was as feverishly eager as the boy's.

This reckless dash brought the sounds nearer, and they continued on until it seemed that only a thin partition must separate them from the miner who was wielding the pick. Then they shouted together with all the power of their vigorous lungs.

The clinking of the pick stopped.

"He hears us!" the detective exclaimed. "If these cartridges aren't too wet I'll give him a serenade with the revolver."

The weapon was whipped out and a succession of shots quickly fired.

"What ye doin'?" drawled the miner, his voice sounding feeble and indistinct. "Firin' blasts in a new tunnel? You want to be keeful er you'll tumble this hull bizness down onto me. Where air ye, anyway?"

"Here!" shouted Ware. "We're not firing blasts. That was my revolver. We're lost in here and can't get out. Can't you get to us

some way, or blow a hole through this wall? I don't think it is very thick."

The miner uttered an inarticulate cry, and they heard the pick strike as it fell from his hands.

"Stay there!" he yelled, and his resounding footsteps showed that he was racing away.

"Oh, do you think he will come back?" Harry anxiously questioned.

"I judge he is gone after help," was the reassuring answer. "There's no reason to fear he will abandon us. These miners are not likely to be in Leonard's secret."

For fully ten minutes they waited in intense suspense. Then they were cheered by the sounds of approaching voices.

"Holler ag'in, so we'll know where ye air!" the miner shouted, coming close up to the wall.

With this they eagerly complied; and soon had the satisfaction of hearing drills eating their way into the rock before them.

"Now, git as far back as ye kin!" the voice again commanded. "We're a-goin' to shoot 'er."

Both understood the full significance of this, and ran back along the wall until they reached a point where they felt safe. Here they had not long to wait. A muffled boom and a jar announced the explosion. On again reaching the place they found a ragged rent in the wall and beheld the dancing lights of the returning miners.

The riven rocks were piled in a confused heap, and when the lights were near enough to make the venture safe, they scrambled wildly through the opening, shouting and laughing like school-boys released for a vacation. To their surprise the miners greeted them coldly and even suspiciously.

"What were ye doin' in there?" growled the spokesman of the party. "Never knowed they was such a hole back thar before. Ye ain't miners, I 'low?" flashing his light over their dress.

"Ah, gentlemen, what do you take us to be? Badgers?" and the oily showman gleamed from beneath the rough exterior. "Send for your foreman and we will explain matters to him."

"Foreman ain't around," the questioner snarled. "We'll do jist as well, I reckon."

"Certainly! certainly!" with airy briskness. "I only wanted to explain how we came to be in there. You belong to the day shift, I take it? We came down last night, with the foreman's permission. We are strangers in your growing young city, and took a sudden fancy to look into the bowels of the earth, hereaway."

He stopped and felt for his watch, which was still running in spite of its recent bath.

"I thought I couldn't be far from right!" glancing at the dial. "It's almost sunset up above, where the sun shines. One's stomach is as good as a watch, on occasions. As I was saying, we came down to look over the mine; and fearing to soil our silken attire, we arrayed ourselves in garments proper for such a ramble."

The miners were staring at him distrustfully, but there was no sign of recognition in their faces. If they had ever seen him before, his strange garb and coal-blackened face would have served to screen his identity.

"Good thing ye did, too, jedgin' by the looks of 'em."

The showman glanced at his soaked and muddy garments, and smiled.

"I see you're bound to think us road-agents, hiding from the grim grip of the law. I don't know that I can blame you, though, for the whole thing has a queer look. After coming down as I explained, we wandered off into the old north chamber, and when that blast was fired last night we were shut in."

The miner's jaw dropped.

"Thunder!" he ejaculated.

"No, it wasn't thunder, though it sounded like it," and his face became irradiated with a sort of ghastly humor. "It was the explosion of giant powder and the tumbling of rocks. That explosion will make plain, no doubt, the why and the wherefore of the curdling of the milk in the cocoanut. We couldn't get back the way we went in, and so we wandered on, found the stream, dived into this cave, heard the clinking of the pick—and you know the rest."

It was so remarkable a story the miners could do nothing, for a moment, but stare.

"It sounds straight enough," ventured one of them, hitching up his trowsers like a sailor, "though it seems 'most beyond believin'. An' the most sing'lar part of it is, that it's the fu'st time a blast has been fired in there sence I've been hyer."

"Yes," said the spokesman. "Ole Leonard tuck a sudden notion into his head that thar was

jes' heaps an' gobs o' val'able coal in that tunnel, an' had a blast got ready, though the foreman tol' him ther' warn't nothin' but rock; an' las' night hit-war fired."

"Well, gentlemen," and the Warbler fidgeted uneasily, "if the confession and catechism have been gone through with satisfactorily, I'd like to go above, for the pangs of hunger are becoming somewhat distressing!"

At this the miners withdrew and conferred for a time in low whispers. When they returned, the spokesman led the way to the shaft, and Warbling William and his boy second were soon in the fresh, outer air.

CHAPTER X.

AN UNFOUNDED SUSPICION.

It was growing dark as they hastened from the mine toward the town. When they reached it the street lamps were being lighted.

"We got out of that place just in time," Ware chuckled. "The night shift will go on in a few minutes, and they might have given us trouble. I'm hungry as a starved coyote."

They ascended to their room in the hotel without being observed. Here they changed their clothing and removed all traces of their recent adventures. Miss Fulton was not in the dining-room—Leonard usually had his meals served in his apartments—and no one appeared to remember that they had been absent; though the waiters must have noticed that they consumed an enormous amount of food.

When they had satisfied their hunger they again retreated to their room and remained there until time for the evening performance.

"I want to give the plotters a surprise," the Warbler asserted. "I hope they have given out that there will be no show to-night. They'll be somewhat taken aback, if they've informed the crowd that we've left the city."

He rubbed his hands and laughed lightly at the thought. Then he began humming something to the effect that his name was Captain Kidd, as he sailed; and constructing the sentences of a song he proposed to sing that night.

Never were men so thunderstruck as were John Leonard and Shelby Tanner when Warbling William and Master Harry appeared in the crowd at the customary hour and mounted the little stage. Tanner nervously dropped the bottle from which he was pouring liquor, and Leonard's face took on an ashy pallor.

After the opening ballad, the Warbler thrummed reflectively on his guitar and then began to sing of a youth who was decoyed away by scheming villains and robbed. The whole story of Lewis Cavendish's mysterious disappearance and of the efforts to find him was rehearsed in doggerel verse. Then he plunged into the future, became prophetic, showed the triumph of right and the close of the chief villain:

"At a rope's end he was whirled,
And from life was quickly hurled;
And no more he'll vex the world—
As it sails."

This sort of retributive justice exactly suited the ideas of the citizens of Rocket Range, and they howled their delighted appreciation.

Through it all John Leonard had stood statue-like, one hand grasping the bar for support, and his eyes dilated with fascinated horror. As for Shelby Tanner, he spilled so many glasses of liquor and talked altogether so incoherently that the customers began to think he had been drinking some of his own vile decoctions.

When the song ended, Leonard abruptly quitted the room.

"The old scamp's gone to talk with the miners!" Ware whispered to the boy, who was coming upon the stage to execute his tumbling tricks. "They'll have a mighty fishy story to tell him. The chances are about ten to one he'll think we've thrown money around like autumn leaves, and bribed the whole caboodle."

He then passed on into the wing, to reappear later with other songs and ballads.

When the performance ended he approached the bar. Tanner had regained his equanimity, but he could not repress a curious stare, and the question:

"Where have you fellers been? Ye could have knocked me down with a feather, this evenin'. Ye didn't show up fer breakfast ner dinner, and somebody reported that you'd skipped the town. Glad ye didn't, fer that would 'a' knocked my fat plum into the fire."

"Only out on a pleasure jaunt!" said the Warbler, serenely. "We were led to believe there might be diamonds other than black in the depths of the Jim Crow Mine, and thought to astonish the natives by bringing one up. I

suppose you never heard there was anything down there but a very ordinary quality of coal?"

Tanner looked confused, and declared he never had.

"I think I outlined the case just right while we were shut in the north chamber!" the detective said to the boy, an hour later. "There can't be a doubt that Tanner is in Leonard's secret. He showed his guilt in every word and action. It begins to look as if we were surrounded by spies here. We'll have to keep our eyes and ears wide open or we'll get into a worse trap than the one we just escaped from."

The next morning, feeling that further disguise in that direction was useless, Ware openly and boldly called on Miss Malcolm. She seemed to have been hourly and anxiously expecting him, and showed none of the agitation he had anticipated. Her first questions related to the success of his venture.

"Calm as a May morning," he muttered. "As good an actress as I ever had to cope with. She'd make her fortune in tragedy."

Her eager inquiries irritated him.

"No doubt you are entirely ignorant of what has occurred?" with a sarcastic and ominous glance.

She recoiled as if the blunt words were scorpion whips.

"I don't understand," she stammered. "Why do you speak that way? Something has happened. What was it? Surely Lewis isn't dead?"

He looked at her coldly and almost scornfully.

"Do you mean to say, Miss Malcolm, that you didn't have a hand in the trick that was played on me?"

Her tear-wet eyes burned indignantly, and she straightened up in a way to show that, without knowing the meaning of the question, she yet resented it.

"I mean to say you are talking Greek, Mr. Ware! I am not an expert at solving riddles. If you know anything about Lewis Cavendish, tell me, for the suspense is killing me!"

Then, woman-like, she broke down and began to sob in a touching way.

The detective was evidently puzzled and distressed.

"Come!" he said. "I thought to make certain accusations. Perhaps I have judged you wrongfully. Let's talk it over calmly, and I think I can get at the truth of the matter. To answer your question: I have neither seen nor heard anything of Lewis Cavendish."

She lifted her pale face and looked frankly at him.

"I don't know what it is you want to discuss, or what accusations you meant to bring. I had so hoped you would have some news of Lewis. I have been even joyfully fancying he might come with you. And you spoke so—so—"

"Lewis wasn't in the mine. There was no prison in the north chamber—though it was turned into one almost as soon as we entered it. We were trapped, the boy and I, and I'm free to say I thought you had a hand in the dastardly scheme, to entomb us alive in that dreadful place."

Her glance was one of pain and reproach.

"You are either a very clever actress, Miss Malcolm, or I was wholly wrong in my conclusions concerning you. You received that letter in the manner you stated?"

She inclined her head in assent.

"It is a forgery!" and he drew it from his pocket. "A very good one, for Harry was sure the handwriting was his brother's. Following the directions in that, we went into the north chamber of the mine, night before last, and were imprisoned by a blast fired for that purpose and at Leonard's own orders."

Then, narrowly watching her as he talked, he told the story of their imprisonment and escape, as it is known to the reader.

"I can't blame you for your suspicions," she said, sympathetically. "But, you must believe me when I say, I thought the letter genuine. Leonard's effort to remove you from his path shows, though, that Lewis is alive. That assurance is worth everything."

She arose and took a packet of letters from a desk.

"See!" she exclaimed, exhibiting the envelopes. "These are from Lewis. Since you were here I discovered that others of them had been stolen. I believe, now, Miss Fulton carried them away to give to Leonard. Without such copies the forgery could not have been done."

She spread one beside the forged letter, for comparison. Close scrutiny revealed many minor differences, plain enough to an expert but not likely to attract the attention of others.

"And you have revealed to no one my

identity or intentions?" he asked, when the examination was concluded.

"No one!" she protested. "That is, with the exception of aunt."

"And you are sure the secret is safe with her?"

"Perfectly safe. She has had no opportunity to tell any one, even were she so inclined."

"It baffles me!" Ware admitted. "Leonard has penetrated my disguise and found out my secret. The perplexing question is, how did he accomplish it?"

It was a problem not to be solved by ingenious theorizing; and when he left the house the whole matter was still wrapped in mystery.

Of one thing, however, he had assured himself: That was the perfect innocence and sincerity of Maud Malcolm.

CHAPTER XI.

THE KICKER AROUSED.

To solve the mystery, to get at the real facts in the case, was the task now presented. How this was to be accomplished, though, taxed the detective's ingenuity to the utmost.

The plan they had been pursuing, that of shadowing and watching, seemed as good as anything that could be devised; and they bent every effort to secure the best results it offered. Yet the days passed without positive developments.

No amorous swain ever haunted sweetheart more persistently than Warbling William haunted the painted barmaid. He was at her side almost constantly, in season and out of season whispering sweet words into her evidently willing ears. But his efforts in that line brought no new facts to light. And though he became more and more convinced that she was in Leonard's confidence and pay, yet he could entrap her into no betrayal of her employer's secrets.

In these efforts the Warbler was constantly distressed by the feeling that he was playing with an edge tool whose keenness and cutting capacity was unknown and unknowable. He knew the barmaid was watching his every tone and action as narrowly as he was watching hers, and the knowledge did not tend to complacency and serenity of mind. It was a singular game of savagery and skill matched against cunning and wit. Neither was deceived in the least by the lavish protestations of the other; and aside from furnishing a little amusement, their verbal fencing amounted to nothing.

It achieved results, however, in a line different from anything he had contemplated. Sam Brown, the Kicker, had taken it into his bushy head to fall desperately in love with Miss Fanny Fulton, and the consequence was that a ragged and somber war-cloud quickly loomed above the social horizon of Rocket Range.

"I'll have to look out for Brown," the detective asserted, when discussing this new phase of affairs with his boy second. "He's apt to be reckless and bull-headed. I don't think he has ever quite forgiven me for publicly labeling him as a kicker; and now that I have crossed his love trail he may try to do me up."

Brown's first open declaration of war was the hissing of a ballad which the Warbler rendered in the course of a performance on the saloon stage. The Warbler paid no heed to this, but when it was repeated in a peculiarly aggravating way he was forced to take notice of it.

"I see that the Kicker is still alive," he smilingly averred, beaming genially over the mixed audience. "I am glad to know he is determined to maintain his hard-earned reputation. The gem just rendered is one of the best in my extensive repertoire. If the gentleman thinks he can render a better I will yield up the stage to him and let him try his 'prentice hand. I have sung that ballad from the Black Hills to the Rio Grande, and it was never hissed before."

"Durn yer ballads!" Brown growled. "Ye'r a pesky fake, anyhow, and can't sing ekal to a guinea-hen."

In this exhibition of humor, Brown verbally "put his foot into it." Few men could handle the lash of the satirist as could the dapper little showman; and in the word-duel that ensued, Brown was routed, horse, foot and dragoon.

After the performance he hung around the outer entrance as if thinking of administering bodily chastisement to the man who had thus overthrown him; but he evidently thought better of it as his temper cooled, for he departed after a time with a select group of cronies.

The detective, while not in the least afraid of Brown, was extremely willing that the matter should pass in that way. He felt that he would be compelled to shoot the Kicker should the latter draw a weapon, and he was averse to bloodshed.

The next evening, while walking with the barmaid in the shadow of the trees near the little stream which flowed by the town, a man rushed at him from behind a leafy screen. A glance sufficed to reveal the reddened and drink-swollen face of the Kicker. The latter held a murderous-looking knife in his right hand, and began to swear furiously as he made a dash.

The would-be assassin apparently had no allies near, and as he came on, the Warbler squared himself to meet him. But, when the Kicker was almost within striking distance, the barmaid began to scream hysterically, and clung to the detective in a way to render him partially helpless.

"Oh! oh!" she shrieked. "Save me, Mr. Ware! Save me! He means to kill me, I know! He said he would if I didn't quit going with you. Oh, dear me! Oh, dear me!"

"Let loose!" the detective shouted, angrily. "Don't hold to my arms that way. Don't you see he's got a knife?"

In spite of his command she clung to him with the pertinacious grip of a drowning person.

"Words ain't trumps this evenin'!" the Kicker snarled, ripping the detective's coat with a vicious stroke. "You kin han'le thet tongue o' yourn purty tol'able slick, but tongues ain't knives, as you'll find out in jes' about a second."

While saying this he was maneuvering for a better stroke, rushing 'round and 'round the almost helpless detective, like a dog harrying some hapless animal.

Again and again Ware tried to shake off the screaming barmaid.

"Can't you see that he's trying to kill me?" he cried, gripping her by the shoulder with his left hand and holding her at arm's length. "Let loose, I say! You're a woman, but I'll not be responsible for the consequences if you don't."

The more he commanded the tighter she clung, and for a little while it seemed that nothing could save him from the murderous knife of the Kicker. But the detective tightened his clutch on her shoulder, and a stunning right-hander under the jaw bowled the big ruffian over senseless.

"Now, will you let loose of me?" the exasperated detective demanded, shifting his hand to the barmaid's throat. "Or will you compel me to choke some little sense into you? This nonsense of your's came near proving my death!"

"Oh, am I really safe?" she panted. "Oh, dear me, Mr. Ware, I surely thought he would kill me! He's such a terrible fellow when he's angry. There, he's getting up!"

She gave another scream, and again attempted to clasp the detective.

"Enough of that!" he snarled, giving her a headlong push which sent her spinning away from him. "One at a time is quite sufficient for comfort. Now, stand back, or suffer the consequences!"

Brown was staggering to his feet, one hand caressing his bruised jaw and the other holding the keen knife. His red eyes flamed with drunken and vindictive rage.

"Look out!" he yelled. "I'm comin' fer ye! Blast yer tarnal hide, I'll rip ye into ribbons fer thet!"

The barmaid was giving vent to premonitory screams, and symptoms of another rush.

"Stand back!" Ware commanded. "Both of you, stand back. I've had enough of this for one bout."

As he said it he drew a pair of revolvers from the pockets of his coat and leveled them, one at the Kicker and the other at the barmaid.

Brown wavered when he saw the deadly tube pointed at his head, but the hysterical Miss Fulton came straight on.

The Kicker took fresh courage from this and recommenced his advance.

"You will have it, I see!" Ware shouted, pulling the trigger of the weapon he had leveled at Brown.

Only an ominous click followed, showing that the revolver was empty.

"What cursed plot is this?" he cried, dropping the useless thing and as quickly leveling the other.

The same result followed when he pulled the trigger.

"Oh, I've got ye!" the ruffian yelled, when he saw the detective's discomfiture and understood the cause. "I'll carve ye into saggies an' feed ye to the kyotes, that's what I'll do! You'll think I'm a Kicker, shore 'nough, when I set my huffs onto ye!"

Ware hurled the revolver at his head, and turned to confront the screeching maid, who was endeavoring to again wind her arms about him in a way to render him completely helpless.

"Curse you!" he gasped, clutching her by the throat. "You don't get hold of me a second time. I see through your little trick."

But the barmaid was as active as a cat, and exceedingly strong for a woman; and as he turned to parry Brown's vicious thrust, she writhed out of his grasp and again came at him with arms outspread.

Had the Kicker not been too drunk to secure the advantages she thus afforded him, it would have gone extremely hard with the detective; who, notwithstanding the fact that he was a trained athlete and boxer, found his hands more than full. Brown was too tipsy, however, to stand steadily on his legs; and when Ware again managed to clutch the barmaid by the throat, his terrible right-handers knocked the ruffian down as fast as he could get up.

At last, when Brown refused to rise, he loosened his grip on the throat of the half-insensible maid, darted forward and secured the wicked-looking knife. With this in his hands he felt he could cope with a dozen such foes.

"Now, come on!" he cried, his face flaming with rage. "You will find me ready for you."

The Kicker had had a sufficient taste of the detective's prowess, however. For a time he lay where he had fallen, to all semblance dead. Then, with a cringing and humiliated air, he crawled to his feet and disappeared in the thickening gloom.

CHAPTER XII.

DIAMOND CUT DIAMOND.

"Oh, that was just too terrible for anything!" the barmaid panted, feeling of her bruised throat, where the lines made by Ware's fingers shone as redly as her painted cheeks. "He intended to kill me, I know! How can I ever thank you, Mr. Ware, for saving me from him?"

The detective gave her a look of unutterable scorn, which was partially lost on her, however, owing to the increasing darkness.

"It's useless to keep up that play-acting!" he asserted. "You were a party to his dastardly attempt on my life, and denials only make your act more despicable."

She resented the charge with a scornful laugh.

"And this to me, after all your love-making! I really gave you credit for more gallantry. You must think me an ogre, or some such terrible creature, Mr. Ware!"

"I know you for a demon!" the words rushing hotly from his lips. "You wanted Brown to kill me, and tried to hold me so he would have no trouble in committing the deed."

She covered her ears with her hands:

"I positively refuse to listen to anything so dreadful! If you propose to talk to me that way, I shall go straight home, and leave you to eat your heart out, here in the darkness."

"Which would be a terrible calamity!" with a mirthless chuckle. "You will greatly oblige me by doing that same."

"Then I'll not do it. It isn't good policy for a lady to oblige her lover."

He could not resist the feeling that she was ridiculing him.

"No doubt I was a poor fool for ever cultivating your acquaintance," picking the revolvers up from where he had hurled them. "You are not what I thought."

"And what was that?"

"You are so very shrewd, you can guess, no doubt!"

"That you thought me a poor, simple creature whom you could use as a tool. I'm right, am I not?"

Ware smiled as he pocketed the weapons.

"Think what you like, Miss Fulton. Whether right or wrong, I fancy that neither of us will have use for the other after the peculiar happenings of this evening. I don't know that it does any good to quarrel. It only serves to heat one's blood without effecting anything. I have my opinion as to the motives which guided you this evening. Probably you have an equally good opinion of some of the causes which have led me on. I will be gallant enough to waive all prejudicial memories, for the time being, and escort you home, if you will permit."

"Many thanks!" she exclaimed, with a peculiar and irritating emphasis. "You are very kind."

Then she extended her arm, and the two walked slowly and thoughtfully back to Tanner's, where they bade each other good-evening, as if no breath of suspicion had ever come between them.

"She's a desperate creature," he muttered, when he had gained his room. "I wonder who and what she really is? I see plainly that in

tampering with her I've been playing with fire. She isn't simply the affected, paint-bedaubed being I had imagined. She is Leonard's strongest ally, and fully as shrewd and unscrupulous as her chief. I would give more than a pretty penny to penetrate her secret. No doubt the result would startle me."

Harry came in, after a time, and together they discussed the events of the evening.

"I've seen her out walking with Brown several times lately!" the boy declared. "Only yestaday evening they were strolling up and down under those very trees."

"She knew Brown had no very kindly feelings toward me, and I suppose she's been leading him on to make this attempt. Leonard's blow at us in the mines wasn't better planned. You see, if Brown had killed me, she could have been in no way held responsible for the deed. Her natural fright would have seemed a sufficient cause for her clinging to me in a hysterical way and hampering my movements; and besides there was little likelihood that any one would see the affair and be able to refute any stories they might tell about it."

"Yes, it was a shrewd plot; and if the Kicker hadn't hoisted too much poison on board before tackling me, the chances are great that it would have succeeded. I suppose his courage was a little shaky, and he thought to brace it up with a heavy jag of liquid lightning, and inadvertently took more than he could easily carry. I've heard it said there is only one case known where whisky ever benefited anybody; and that was when an Irish well-digger got so full he couldn't go into a well, which caved in, a few minutes after he otherwise would have descended. This adds the second case to the brilliant record."

He was regaining his equanimity, and his cheery joviality began again to bubble to the surface.

"As I've before remarked: If I could convert the barmaid from the evil of her ways I'd like to add her to my detective staff. She would make a splendid acquisition. It couldn't be done, though. Her honesty isn't equal to the strain."

He looked questioning at his revolvers, as he drew them out and began to refill the chambers.

"How that was done rather gets me. I've always boasted that there wasn't a pickpocket alive who could go through my clothing without my knowledge. Yet it's as evident as can be that Miss Fulton extracted these weapons, removed the charges, and then returned them, and I know nothing of when or how she did it."

"Which also goes to show that she knew Brown would attack you this evening," the boy added.

"No doubt, my boy, she's had some sort of understanding with Brown, or has said something to induce him to attack me when he did. I only wish I knew the whole secret of it."

There seemed no way of laying this secret bare, however, and after some further talk they descended to the bar-room, where the usual crowd was already gathering.

Ware kept a close watch for the Kicker, believing that that individual would not tamely submit to the ignominious drubbing he had received, but would attempt, in some way, to get even. He also feared the barmaid might hatch some other plot to retrieve the failure of the evening.

Up to the hour for the commencement of the performance, however, nothing occurred to arouse his suspicions.

The singing of the first ballad had scarcely ended, when a boisterous commotion was heard at the street door, and a moment later Sam Brown strode into the saloon at the head of a procession of intoxicated cronies.

"There he is!" he bawled, pointing a dirty forefinger at the Warbler, who was bowing his acknowledgment of the applause with which the song had been received. "Down the dog! That's the chap what tried to kill me this evening! Don't let 'im git away from ye!"

CHAPTER XIII.

THE TROUBLE IN THE SALOON.

"Down 'im! down 'im!" the Kicker continued to roar, as the startled crowd commenced to surge and rise from the benches. "Lay 'im out stiffer'n a salted mackerel."

The confusion and panic produced by the entrance of the yelling horde of intoxicated ruffians can scarcely be described. As they whipped out their weapons in response to the commands of the Kicker, a wild scramble for the doors and windows took place, in which benches were overturned, and men sprawled and rolled in howling and cursing heaps.

The coolest man in the room, apparently, was the Warbler. Not a muscle of his face seemed

to change, yet a hot light glowed in his eyes which boded ill to whoever pressed him too closely.

Amid it all Brown and his men pressed steadily forward, spreading out as much as possible, for the evident purpose of hemming the detective in and effectually preventing his escape.

"What is it you want, gentlemen?" the Warbler asked, serenely, bowing politely as he placed his hands on his weapons in the pockets of his coat. "There is no necessity for kicking up such a row. You will always find me at the old stand. I suppose, though, the Kicker feels called on to maintain his reputation!"

"You'll feel the Kicker's heels purty to'able quick, now, I kin tell ye!" Brown snarled, leveling and discharging his heavy pistol.

His intense rage caused his hand to tremble, and the ball flew wide of the mark.

Then, with a lightning-like movement, the Warbler hurled one of his weapons at Brown's head, the aim being so true that the burly scoundrel dropped in his tracks like a slain ox.

This was replied to by a chorus of yells and a volley of shots. But Warbling William was not there to receive the leaden compliment. After hurling the revolver he vaulted like an athlete into the wing of the stage, and the pistol balls swept harmlessly over the place he had just vacated.

Harry Cavendish was in the little wing, having gone there to be ready for his part in the performance.

When the detective noticed him, he shouted: "Quick! Follow me! Don't let the drunken fools see you!"

Then he smashed a rear window with a heavy kick, and leaped into the alley that ran along the rear of the building.

When the detective disappeared from the stage with such astonishing celerity, the reckless mob scrambled forward, apparently certain he could not now escape them. The boy was about to rush through the window after the detective, but their sudden appearance disconcerted him, and he crouched in an angle of the wall, drawing over himself a piece of cloth which chanced to be lying near.

Fortunately the smashed window drew the attention of the men, and through it they streamed, without casting a glance at the point where the boy lay concealed.

The detective had been waiting near the building for his boy pard, but he now drew further back into the shadows, and narrowly watched the men as they ran here and there in a blind and aimless search.

On several occasions they came within a few feet of his hiding-place, but the shadows were so dense they could scarcely have discovered him without stumbling bodily against him.

In the course of a few minutes the Kicker himself appeared, having partially recovered from the effects of the blow. This was the signal for a recommencement of the search, which the Kicker now led in person. But the result was the same as before. The Warbler could be nowhere discovered.

After an hour of useless beating and thrashing among the black shadows they retired to the saloon to soothe their ruffled feelings with copious libations.

When the sounds emanating from their retreat began to assume a jovial character, Ware left his place of concealment and crept up to the walls of the building.

"Strange what has become of Harry!" he muttered, as he strained his ears to catch the drift of the talk. "It can't be they have murdered the boy. If they have, Brown will pay dearly for this night's frolic!"

His anxiety finally became so great that he crept back into the wing through the broken window; and creeping on his hands and knees thoroughly explored the gloomy place. He found the cloth beneath which Harry had concealed himself, but not a trace did he find of the boy.

Failing in this he worked a hole in the wing with the blade of his pocket-knife, and for a long time watched and listened to the carousings of the drunken wretches.

Shelby Tanner, smiling and affable as usual, was pouring out the fiery liquor with a lavish hand, apparently receiving no money therefor from any one.

"Leonard is at the bottom of this outrage," Ware gritted, as he noted this fact. "Tanner, as his tool and agent, is standing all the expense to-night. I wonder how much Brown has received for this attempt to do me up? These efforts to put me out of the way prove one thing, anyhow; and that is that I'm worrying Leonard a great deal, even if I'm not accomplishing

much. They show, too, that Lewis Cavendish is alive. Either that, or I'm close on proof that he was murdered by Leonard."

He fidgeted uneasily as the talk failed to reveal anything of Harry.

"I wonder where the boy can be?" he questioned again and again. "I'm positive he didn't follow me out of the window, as I told him to!"

Not knowing what to do, and determined not to leave the place until he had gained some definite information, he hitched slowly and cautiously backward and again descended into the alley. Here he called softly, and receiving no reply, made his way to the street in front of the saloon.

Some of the Kicker's men, hilarious from frequent potations, were beginning to leave, and to avoid these he retreated to the shadows of the buildings opposite. From this point he watched for another hour; and was just thinking of leaving, when he saw Leonard enter the saloon.

At this he again crossed the street, and peered into the room. The last of the revelers had departed, and Leonard was leaning over the bar, whispering confidentially to Tanner.

The detective was trying to devise some plan by which he could hear what was said, when Tanner advanced and locked the door.

At this, Ware hastened to the broken window in the rear, but on arriving there he found Tanner blocking it in such a way that he knew he could never get in.

"Shut out," he growled, "and I would have given a hundred dollars to hear what those rascals are going to talk about."

CHAPTER XIV.

HARRY'S ADVENTURES.

As the howling mob rushed by in pursuit of the detective, Harry Cavendish crouched tremblingly beneath the concealing cloth, fearing to breathe lest he should betray his whereabouts to the bloodthirsty wretches. He had a sublime confidence in the ability of his friend to take care of himself, and thought only of his own safety.

When the last of the mob had streamed into the alley, he cast back the cloth and was about to rise; but he drew back in an affrighted way as he heard the tramp of heavy feet and the loud voice of Sam Brown.

The latter stumbled through the wing, swearing horribly and endeavoring to wipe away the blood which half-covered his face. He was followed by Shelby Tanner; who seemed equally indignant and excited.

When they had passed, and no further sounds were heard in the saloon, the boy again cast off the cloth which had so well served him, and crept to the end of the wing looking out upon the stage. The saloon was deserted; and fearing he could not make his way from the place by the rear alley, he darted into the big room with the intention of going out at the front door.

He ran quickly forward to this, and was horror-stricken to find it locked. Even the windows, which had been hoisted by the frightened *habitués* of the place in their efforts to escape, were closed and barred.

"Tanner, half-believing that the Warbler had not left the building, had taken this precaution to prevent his escape should be yet within the walls."

The lighted chandeliers made the room almost as light as day, and Harry realized that should any of the crowd chance to return all hope of getting away unseen would be at an end. For an instant he hesitated, not knowing which way to turn. Then he darted behind and under the bar. The place was filled with a strange assortment of old bottles, rags, paper, and all the odds and ends that collect in a drinking den.

"Just the thing!" he whispered, as he drew some of the bottles about him and tucked the mass of rags and paper around and over his person. "They'll never think of looking for me here. How I'm ever to get out, though, I don't know."

He had concealed himself none too soon, for just then he heard Tanner re-enter the room, talking to some cronies. Their words showed that Ware had effected his escape.

"Look the buildin' over," Tanner commanded. "If he ain't in hyer, he's got clean away. Sing'lar how he broke loose from you fellers, after you had him cinched so tight. It was about as slick a trick as I ever see."

"We didn't think of him turnin' circus actor!" one of them growled, as they began the search.

This order to examine the room seemed fraught with new peril to the boy, who had been so prematurely congratulating himself on the security of his position. But the explorers did

not approach the bar. Tanner, however, glanced beneath it in a perfunctory way, and then perched himself on a stool in his customary place.

One by one the others strolled in from the unsuccessful quest outside; and when the majority had gathered, Tanner commenced to deal out generous quantities of the fiery beverage for which his house was noted.

"Help yourselves, gentlemen," he urged. "It's as free as water, to-night. Mr. Brown thinks you done the fair thing by him, even if he didn't git the man he was gunnin' fer; an' has give orders to set 'em up liberal, an' that he'll settle the bill. This ain't my funeral, ye know, but it does me good to see a man treat his frien's han'some."

No second invitation was required; and if the Kicker really had the bill to pay, it took several months of hard work in the mines to liquidate it.

Brown was almost the last man to enter the saloon; and in his boisterous fashion he repeated the barkeeper's request to "h'ist p'ison;"—a request which every man was already doing his best to comply with.

While this saturnalia was in progress, Harry Cavendish, with nerves strained and pulses throbbing, was crouching in his cramped and confined quarters, a prey to the keenest fear. At almost every movement made by Tanner he felt himself on the verge of being discovered; and what it might mean to fall into the hands of these bibulous wretches he scarcely dared think. But the minutes dragged by, and when he heard first one and then another leave the room his courage began to return.

Finally the last of the laggards bade Tanner good-night, and stumbled into the darkness of the street. Tanner walked about for a time, in a restless, uneasy way. Then all became still, and Harry hoped he had also quitted the place, though there was little ground for the hope, for the lights were still burning. The silence was maintained for so long a time, however, that Harry was on the point of venturing out to ascertain the cause, when some one entered the room.

At this Tanner arose from a box near the end of the bar, on which he had been sitting, and Harry realized how very close he had come to betraying himself.

The new-comer was John Leonard, as was made evident by Tanner when greeting him.

"All gone are they?" Leonard whispered, bending over the bar. "Egad! I'm glad of it! Such a noisy set I never saw. I could hear them in my room, and they almost ran me wild. You must have nerves of iron, Tanner, to stand it!"

"I'm purty well case-hardened," Tanner averred, with a comprehensive grin. "I kin ginerly stand a good deal of racket, when I'm well-paid fer it; an' you're a good paymaster, Leonard, if I can't say anything else fer you. As good a one as I ever worked fer."

"Don't tell that to any one else, please!" Leonard hastily commanded. "I pay you for keeping still, as much as for some other things. By Jove! It's a pity that fellow got away to-night!"

He took a hurried turn up and down the room, then came back and ordered Tanner to close the door and arrange the room so that no one could possibly get in to eavesdrop them.

"I've got something very important to talk about, Tanner, and I don't want any one to hear what we may say. Bar everything, windows and all. Then turn out the lights and see if you can advise me a little. I hope you haven't been muddling your head with the foul stuff you dealt out to-night."

"Nary time!" Tanner asserted. "It's a wise barkeeper that knows enough to let his own p'ison alone, an' in that respect I calc'late I'm one o' the wisest. I never tech the stuff, myself, though I've ladled out bar's to them that's fools enough to drink it."

Harry, squeezed in among the bottles beneath the bar, almost imagined he could hear his own teeth chatter. He knew that if discovered, now he would meet with little favor at the hands of these men. Nevertheless, he was glad that an opportunity for learning something of importance was about to be presented, even if it did seemingly increase his peril.

When Tanner had complied with Leonard's request he came back and again seated himself on the box at the end of the bar.

"This thing is worrying me a good deal," Leonard observed, as he took a seat at the barkeeper's side. "It seems impossible to put that fellow out of the way, without at the same time running my own head into a noose. I don't care to do that, fer it's already far enough into one."

I thought that jealousy business would nerve Brown up to the deed, but he made a botch of it, in his usual manner. I don't know that I ought to blame the fellow, though, for I didn't do any better when I tried my own hand at the bellows."

"Hain't diskivered anything new, have ye?" Tanner questioned, with some nervousness.

"No; but I've come to the conclusion that the only way to throw this bloodhound off the trail is to end the trail. I thought I'd ask your advice about it."

"I don't adzactly ketch on."

"Well, we've been holding the young fellow in jail at Silverton a long while. Why continue it? Why not organize a mob, storm the jail, and have him hung?"

Harry gave such a gasp that he felt sure his retreat would be found.

"We tried somethin' like that onc't, ye know!" Tanner reminded.

"Yes, and failed. But we needn't fail again, if we work the thing right. If we don't do something, this cursed detective will yet drop onto our secret."

"Your secret, ye mean," Tanner chuckled. "Remember that I hain't handled the cards any furdur than I've had to."

"Have it your own way. An accomplice is as guilty as the principal. We'll not quarrel about that, though. If you can think of a better plan, tell it."

"Who'll ye git to put the thing through?"

"I'll take the responsibility of that myself. I can rely on the jailer, and I've friends and allies in that town."

"Then, I say it's a good plan," declared the barkeeper, breathing freer when he found he was not expected to manipulate the scheme. "A bu'stin' good plan. If I'd stood in your shoes I'd 'a' done it long ago."

"I don't like to," Leonard averred, "and yet I suppose I must."

For a long time he sat with head bowed and brows contracted.

"It can be worked better than that," he declared at last. "The young chap was put in there under an assumed name, and a week or more ago I had the jailer give out the word that he had escaped. So, you'll see the people of the town don't know he's in there now? What's to prevent him from shuffling off this mortal coil some dark night, and no one being the wiser for it?"

"Jes' the thing!" Tanner exclaimed, slapping his thigh, enthusiastically. "Ye couldn't hit it better if ye'd think a week. Now, if ye on'y had the man to do it!"

"Money will find the man!" Leonard assured. "Let's see! Yes, I'll go over there day after tomorrow. I want to find this fellow here, if he can be found, or discover what has become of him."

"I don't 'low he'll show up on the stage ag'in!" with a short, hard laugh.

"It's not likely that he will. I'll have the men keep a lookout for him and the boy to-morrow. They can surely find some trace of them, or at least learn where they have gone. Then the day after I'll go to Silverton, and see that our young friend over there gets as short a shrift as possible."

CHAPTER XV.

A CHANGE OF PLANS.

THE cold-blooded manner in which Leonard made the statement caused the boy's heart to sink and his blood to chill. A man who could speak of a contemplated murder in that calm and collected way was a dangerous man, indeed.

After much further talk on the same subject, and a discussion of the troublesome affair in all its bearings, Leonard took his departure. The lamps, which had been turned very low, were now extinguished; and Tanner followed his chief, locking the front door after him.

When certain that Tanner was gone, Harry crept from his hiding-place. His limbs were so stiffened by the long confinement, that for a time he could scarcely move.

"I'm afraid I'm cooped up here for all night," he whispered, going to one of the windows and feeling of the barred fastenings. "It would puzzle a regular burglar to get in or out of this place."

The thought brought with it a refreshing recollection. A burglar had made his way into the place only a few nights before, coming in by the way of the cellar, and cutting a hole through the floor of the stage. The hole had been temporarily closed until new flooring could be laid,

and the chances of escape by that way looked promising.

Hurrying to that point the boy found that a square of heavy planking had been let into the aperture and fastened so it could not be removed from beneath. The fastenings above, however, could be slipped out of place without much effort. A gloomy hole was revealed by the displacement.

"I'll have to leave the hole open," with a dubious shake of the head. "I don't like to do that; but I can't see that there's any help for it—so here goes!"

He swung himself through the hole, and after hanging in mid-air for a moment, dropped into the gloomy cellar. The fall was about ten feet, but he landed without mishap.

"My, I hope that open hole won't give the snap away!" he exclaimed, pulling himself together and staring at the yawning cavity. "There's one consolation, they can't know who did it, whatever they think, and if I can only find Mr. Ware we'll fix things so that their guessing won't do them much good."

To get out, now, by the coal-hole, was an easy matter, and, five minutes later, Harry stood in the deserted street. He was puzzling over the direction he ought to take when a low whistle reached him from the shadows of the buildings opposite. He recognized it as Ware's signal.

"Where did you drop from?" Ware asked, when his boy pard had gained his side.

"I didn't drop; I ascended!" and Harry hastily explained how he had escaped from the saloon.

"And you heard the talk? That's fine. I tried every imaginable way to accomplish that. Harry, you're a jewell! Come! Let's hunt up a place where we can talk without danger of being disturbed. I do believe fate is at last going to play them into our hands."

He spoke in a quick and nervous way, and, grasping the boy's arm, fairly dragged him from the spot. When they had gained a safe distance he halted.

"Now, tell me all about it, and as quick as you can."

The boy complied, compressing the story into as few words as possible.

"Silverton! That's the town across the divide. I understand Leonard has an interest in the silver mine there. And they've got Lewis in jail at that place? Well, we'll see if we can't get him out in mighty short order."

"It must be Lewis," Harry exclaimed. "They didn't mention any name, but I felt sure they meant Lewis."

"Certainly; they couldn't have referred to any one else! He's the only person we have any interest in or that they would be likely to speak of in connection with us."

"That will cause a change in our plans. We'll have to drop the show business here and journey to Silverton. I can't say I'm sorry on that account, however, for now that the Kicker has started in to do me up, he'd be apt to cause us a good deal of trouble here. I'm surprised that he could gain so many followers. I don't know that it ought to be thought strange though, when it's understood that Leonard and Tanner are backing him."

He was silent for a time, and then continued:

"No one will expect us to reappear on the stage to-morrow night, anyway. Brown's murderous attempt on my life is all the excuse that's needed to explain our sudden disappearance from the town. I never like to run from danger, or even seemingly run; but we'll do it in this case, and be glad of the opportunity."

He took out his watch and looked at it by the faint starlight.

"Not more than three hours till day. We'll want to be a good distance on our way before the sun rises. It won't do to let Leonard's cut-throats get ahead of us. We can get there by evening, but we'll have to go without food, probably. There's little chance, now, of getting anything of the kind to take with us."

"There's a little restaurant down-town that keeps open all night," Harry reminded.

"I remember it, but we'll have to go there disguised. And I must have my guitar, too. I shall need to carry out the plan I've thought of. Stay here; I'll see if I can't get into our room at Tanner's."

He was off like a shot, without further explanation.

Within fifteen minutes he had returned, bringing with him the guitar, and a change of old and worn garments for each.

"No trouble at all," he cried, gleefully. "Leonard had a man on guard in the hall, but he was a sleepy chuckle-head, and I passed him without him once suspecting any one was near."

He commenced to change his clothing, while speaking; and Harry immediately imitated his example.

"Now we'll try the restaurant," he said, when the cast-off garments had been secreted. "In these rigs, I don't think any one will recognize us."

Such a thing seemed very unlikely, for they now resembled tramps more than anything else. Ware left his guitar with Harry, and visited the restaurant alone; and the keeper of the establishment never once suspected the identity of his customer.

"Now, we're fixed!" the detective ejaculated, as he rejoined the boy. "Ho, for Silverton! Leonard will have to be awfully spry, if he heads us off this time."

CHAPTER XVI.

AT THE SILVERTON JAIL.

"HELLO! Some fine singin' down there!"

The keeper of the Silverton jail poked his head out of the window of his apartment on the second floor, and stared into the street. It wasn't often that he had an opportunity of hearing good singing, or in fact good music of any kind; and the concord of well-attuned voices, with excellent guitar accompaniment, was a treat not to be missed.

He was a burly, thick-set man, called "Buck" Hazelrig, by his acquaintances, and lived alone in the jailer's quarters, rarely seeing any one except the prisoners and the officials with whom he had business. His place had been gained for him by John Leonard, who was apparently as well known and influential here as at Rocket Range; and Leonard was not a man to use as tools men who were inclined to joviality or glibness of speech.

"By George! Makes me think of the ole times, back East, when the Eyetalians used to go 'round fiddlin' an' harpin'."

The brisk ballad had ended; and now on the quiet, evening air rose the soulful words of that sweetly pathetic song:

"Backward! Turn backward! Oh, Time, in your flight!

Make me a child again, just for to-night!
Mother, come back from the echoless shore;
Take me again to your arms, as of yore.
Smooth from my forehead the furrows of care;
Brush the few silver threads out of my hair;
Over my slumbers your lovin' watch keep;
Rock me to sleep, mother! Rock me to sleep!"

The strains carried the jailer back to the old, old days of his lost and misspent youth; and a look that was thoughtful, and even sorrowful, came into his eyes.

"Strike up somethin' a little livelier!" he shouted, leaning from the window. "Too much like follerin' a hearse, that is! Give us 'Sam Bass,' or 'The 'Forty-niner!'"

Each of these was of interminable length; but without a moment's hesitation the disguised detective swung into the story of the "Forty-niner's Daughter:"

"In a cavern in a canyon—
Excavating for a mine;—
Dwelt a miner, 'forty-niner,
And his daughter, Clementine.
Light she was, and like a fairy,
And her shoes were number nine;—
Herring boxes, without topses,
Sandals were for Clementine.

"Oh, my darling! Oh, my darling!
Oh, my darling Clementine!
You are lost and gone forever;—
Dreadful sorry, Clementine!"

This style of words and music exactly suited Buck Hazelrig; and the first verse was scarcely finished before the attraction of the singing became so strong that he hastily left his comfortable seat and descended into the street.

Here a number of others, similarly drawn, were gathering.

When the history of the miner's daughter had been satisfactorily rehearsed, and the exploits of "Sam Bass," the cowboy, recounted, a collection was taken for the benefit of the singers. A gentle hint from Ware also caused the jailer to invite them into his room, where a supper was served, and the singing continued until a late hour.

It had been the detective's intention to gain access to the jail in some such way, but the ease with which it had been accomplished almost surprised him. It was evident the jailer had never heard of the singing at Rocket Range; or, if he had, it never occurred to him to associate the two in a suspicious way.

"I suppose about the only music you ever have is the howling of some half-crazy prisoner?" Ware queried, when the crowd they had collect-

ed had gone. "You must have a lot of 'em in here! I saw quite a number looking out of the cells when we came in."

"D'y'e mean crazy un's?"

"Oh, all kinds! I referred to the number. Silverton must be a famous place for jail-birds."

"It'd be famouser, if all was in that ought to be in."

Ware glanced at Hazelrig's evil face, and mentally agreed with the statement.

"I reckon you wouldn't object to a fellow looking over the place? I was never in a jail before, and am curious to take a peep at the institution."

"Most men'd ruther have as little to do with the thing as possible!" and the jailer gave him a keen scrutiny.

"No doubt. Perhaps I'd feel that way if my knowledge wasn't so limited. What are most of the prisoners in for?"

"Hoss-stealin' an' shootin', giner'ly. Some few on 'em fer stage-robbin' an' sich like. One feller fer whippin' the life nigh 'bout out o' the county jedge what tried him; an' a long-tongued lawyer fer lyin' an' giner'al cussedness."

"An interesting lot!"

Hazelrig laughed, in his dry, peculiar manner.

"That lawyer's an amoosin' cub. He talked at fust o' appealin' to the constertution, er some sech thing; an' made speeches four hours long, 'bout his rights an' juties as an Amerikin citizen. I tol' him he'd haf' to shet off on that, fer he was a-fillin' the hall with so much wind that there was consider'ble danger the ole jail would b'ist 'erself some day an' sail away like a balloon. I don't think the ole jedge would 'a' sent 'im up if he hadn't called hisself D. Webster McCartney, an' parted his hair in the middle. That was jes' too much, that was, an' he had to take the consequences."

"Served him right, no doubt. He's a chap I'd like to see."

"Well, come erlong, if you like. I don't do sich, as a reg'lar thing. If ye git away, though, 'thout that lawyer killin' ye off with a speech, it'll s'prise me."

John Leonard would have wondered much at seeing his trusty henchman become so supple in the hands of the urbane Warbler. His own marvelous craft would have been scarcely equal to so great a task.

Harry, in accordance with previous instructions, had become to all appearances absorbed in the columns of an old paper and was, therefore, not included in this invitation. The detective had not deemed it judicious, even if the chance should offer, to allow Lewis to see and recognize his brother, fearing an exposure would result.

Harry's quiet, however, concealed a torrent of seething emotions. The hour for which he had long hoped and toiled and strived seemed to be approaching. Only a thin partition of walls, as he believed, separated him from the brother he loved and had so long sought; and now that the time for verifying that belief had come he felt that any further delay would surely crush him.

Nevertheless, he maintained an attitude of stoical indifference, when the jailer took up the lamp and led the way into the dark corridor. But when the room he occupied had been plunged in darkness, he left his seat; and, crouching by the door, listened with bated breath to the echoing footsteps and to every sound that broke the midnight stillness.

"Hyer he is," said Hazelrig, stopping before a grated door, and shaking it as he might shake the bars of a lion's cage. He's asleep, prob'ly. Made so many speeches to-day that I 'low he's wore plum out.

"Hey, in there, D. Webster! Hyer's a gen'leman wants ter hear you talk."

At this a dudish-looking young man half-lifted himself from his low cot, popped an eye-glass into one of his protruding eyes, and stared curiously at these disturbers of his dreams.

"I never converse with specimes of the genus tramp!" he asserted, regarding the detective's greasy garments disdainfully.

Then he collapsed, and was buried from sight by the bed-coverings.

Hazelrig laughed loudly, and led the way to the other cells, the occupants of which he aroused in turn. None of them were Lewis Cavendish.

"And these are all?" Ware questioned, glancing at some cells which were apparently empty.

"All that you'd keer to see. There's a crazy young feller in one o' them, an' he'll never let up, if I rouse him."

Just then the voice of the "crazy young feller" broke the stillness, and the jailer hurried the detective away; but not before the latter had decided that that was the particular cell he most wished to investigate.

For beds, that night, Ware and his boy pard were given shake-downs in the jailer's own room. This suited the detective, for the keys to the cells were kept in that room; and he had determined to use them before the dawning of another day, even if force were necessary to accomplish his purpose.

Hazelrig seemed unusually wakeful, talking until a very late hour. But he retired at last; and when his snoring announced his unconsciousness, Ware was ready for his perilous undertaking.

CHAPTER XVII.

CAVENDISH'S STORY.

RISEING softly, the detective crept on tip-toe to the little desk, where, unknown to the jailer, he had seen the keys carefully deposited. The room was plunged in darkness, but he had closely noted the position of the chairs and movable furniture before retiring, and therefore knew just where and how to step.

Once the jailer turned heavily in his sleep, and, with revolver drawn, Ware halted midway between the shake-down and the desk, thinking discovery inevitable. The heaviness of the breathing, however, reassured him, and he went on.

The desk was locked, but he quickly slipped back the bolt with a bent wire, and secured the coveted keys. Then he made his way from the room in the same cautious manner, closing the door after him.

"Cavendish!" he whispered, on reaching the cell which the "crazy young feller" was said to occupy. "Are you in there, Cavendish?"

There was a stir within, a cautious footstep, and a pale, yet handsome face looked out from between the bars.

"Who is it?" was the anxious question.

"Are you Lewis Cavendish?"

"Yes! yes!" as he heard the suggestive jingling of the keys.

His flood of hurried queries was interrupted by the turning of a key in the lock and the opening of the door.

"Come! We haven't any time for talk. Take it for granted that I am your friend, and follow me. The jailer may awaken at any moment, and then we might have trouble in getting out of here."

In spite of his iron nerves, his voice betrayed his anxiety. The jail was situated at one end of the main street of the town, and a jangling of the bell which hung above it would be sufficient to arouse the citizens, and make escape perilous and difficult.

Had he been handling an ordinary case Ware would never have taken such risks. He would have placed Leonard under arrest and secured the release of young Cavendish by writ of *habeas corpus*. But he knew full well how often justice goes awry in the almost lawless mining camps, and realized that such a miscarriage was almost certain to take place in a community owning the sway of John Leonard.

"Don't make any more more noise than a falling feather," he cautioned. "Carry your shoes, and I will show you the way out."

He then led the way through the corridor, down the stairway and into the street.

"Stay here! Your brother Harry is in the building, and I must get him out."

And before the astounded young man could frame a single query, he disappeared in the gloom.

When he returned Harry accompanied him.

"No time for that now," he whispered, interrupting the effusive greeting between the long-separated brothers. "When we get a little further off will do as well. Then, we'll all talk, for I'm as anxious to understand certain things as you are to explain them."

He led the way from the place at a brisk gait, halting when they had gained the edge of timber-fringed hills, a quarter of a mile from the town.

Lewis was bubbling over with the very exuberance of his spirits, and wildly anxious to have the veil lifted from what seemed so mysterious an affair. When the main facts had been rapidly sketched by Harry, he took Ware by the hand, and in a choking, incoherent way thanked him for the hardships he had undergone and the perils he had braved in his behalf.

"It is my calling!" the detective said, humbly. "Whatever I did, I did no more than my duty. Less than that I couldn't do. But time is fly-ing, and you haven't told us your story. We will have to move on, soon."

Thus reminded, Lewis told how Leonard formed his acquaintance in Chicago, and by artful wiles led him to the West.

"After I had drawn the money from the

Cheyenne bank I came to Rocket Range to meet Leonard and arrange for the transfer of the mine. He said there was no bank out here; that he kept all his own money in a private safe, and preferred that I should bring the cash, as he wished to use it in paying off certain indebtedness. Like the dupe I was, I believed him, and complied with his request.

"On arriving at Rocket Range, he engaged horses for both of us, saying the mine was at Silverton, and that we would go out there to look at it. He had already shown me the statements of the business of the mine for the past year, but I had insisted on seeing the property before turning over the money and accepting the deed. Inquiries made at Rocket Range had given me the idea that Leonard was the personification of an honorable gentleman; and, in my inexperience, I no more thought of suspecting him than I would think of suspecting Harry.

"Just before we reached Silverton we stopped at a spring to get a drink, for the day was hot and we had been riding hard. We had no drinking vessel; and, as I stooped over the spring, Leonard struck me a blow on the head with a club.

"All I recollect of the assault is a blinding flash of light, and a sensation as if the heavens had fallen and crushed me. When I recovered consciousness I was lying on my back, partly in the water, and my clothing soaked in my own blood. My money was gone, together with my horse, and I was so weak I could scarcely stagger to my feet.

"Leonard had left me for dead, no doubt. It was then mid-afternoon, and the town still some three miles distant. Weak as I was, I resolved to make my way into the town, denounce Leonard to the authorities, and if he was there secure his arrest.

"Little I knew of the honesty of the officials of Rocket Range! with a harsh and bitter emphasis. "If I had known more, I should have fled from the place as from a pestilence.

"But as it turned out, I was the one to be denounced. A miner had disappeared from Silverton that morning, murdered, no doubt; and as I staggered toward the place, weak and feverish, I met a posse of citizens. Leonard was at their head, and at once denounced me as having slain the missing man. What kind of a story he told to make them believe so foul a lie I am at a loss to imagine.

"They believed it, however, or pretended to believe it; and my blood-stained garments were taken as evidence of my guilt. Urged on by Leonard, the posse became transformed into a howling mob; and about as much ceremony was shown me as if I had been a confessed horse-thief.

"In vain I pleaded my innocence and told the story of how I came to be in that condition. Leonard stated that he had started from Rocket Range with me, but suspecting me of an evil intent on his pocketbook, he had left me and galloped on alone.

"I think my statements were more than half-believed by a few of the men; for when the mob was on the point of hanging me they interfered to prevent it. Then I was thrust into the jail, under a false name as I afterward learned.

"Time after time I pleaded for a hearing, but my pleadings were mocked at. The jailer would not allow me to communicate with any one, nor send out any letters or messages. That I could never quite understand, for I supposed that even the worst criminal had a right to a trial at the earliest and most convenient season."

"I can explain it, I think," Ware interrupted. "You hadn't been in there long until the report was circulated that you had effected your escape. There was no necessity or law for trying a man who was non-come-atable."

Lewis Cavendish gave a gasp of surprise.

"Harry learned that, among other things, while concealed in the saloon. Leonard is a long-headed chap, and that was just another of his shrewd games. How many more we may run onto before we're through with the gentleman only the future can determine. Quite enough to surprise us, no doubt."

"He couldn't have meant to hold me there forever, I suppose?" Lewis questioned, after a moment of thought.

"No; he intended to have you put out of the way. It was all planned; and as the public knew nothing of any such prisoner, I doubt not the matter would have been easy of accomplishment."

Then the detective told of the scheme which Leonard had confided to Tanner only a few hours before.

"A thorough villain!" and Cavendish shuddered involuntarily, as he reflected on the fate which was to have been his. "What does Maud think of that?"

He had already been informed of the part Maud had taken in attempting to discover and rescue him out of Leonard's clutches; and had told the story of his acquaintance and correspondence with her.

"She doesn't know anything about it yet," Ware replied. "We were too greatly pressed for time to see her before starting for this point."

"Won't she be pleased, though, when she knows it all!" and Harry clapped his hands jubilantly at the thought.

The detective laughed.

"And think of my inamorata, Harry! The beautiful and dashing Miss Fulton! She will be tickled out of her seven senses."

"There's one who won't be pleased," said Cavendish. "That's Buck Hazelrig. In fancy I can see him gnashing his teeth and pulling his abundant hair out by the handful."

"We ought to go down and give him a serenade," the happy boy suggested. "I'm a little croaky from last night's work; but I reckon if we'd join in under his window with that guitar, it would create a sensation."

"And a sensation, probably, we shouldn't like. He would have the entire town after us inside of twenty minutes, and we'd have to hump ourselves lively to get away from here with whole skins."

"Pshaw! He wouldn't dare. Why, he couldn't claim that Lew had escaped; for the very good reason, as you said awhile ago, that the people of the town don't know there is such a person as Lew."

"True! Strange that view of the case didn't strike me. Maybe it won't strike him, and he'll arouse the town, anyway, and have a gay old time in explaining why he did it."

He was interrupted by the wild clanging of the jail bell.

"Prophetic words!" the detective cried, starting to his feet. He'd discovered that we're gone and you're likewise missing. We'll have to make tracks for tall timber. Perhaps he has concluded to catch us first and explain afterward. It would be entirely safe, I venture to say, especially if he had John Leonard to assist him in making the explanation. That scamp can come as near to twisting men to suit himself as any fellow I ever saw."

He had picked up his guitar, and now stood listening to the quick strokes of the bell.

"See! There's a light!" he cried. "The people are arousing. We must make ourselves scarce, hereaways, or we'll be in great danger of being taken. The releasing of a prisoner from jail is no light offense in this country. Come!"

And with the command he hurried into the timber, the Cavendishes following close at his heels.

CHAPTER XVIII.

A HASTY FLIGHT.

BUCK HAZELRIG was shrewder than he had been given credit for being. Awakening from sleep, in the early hours of the morning, he discovered that the persons he had mistaken for strolling musicians were missing, and leaped at once to a correct solution of the situation.

Hurrying into his clothing he took the keys from the drawer where they were kept—they had been replaced by Ware—and rushed into the corridor, to find that the cell of the "crazy young feller" was empty.

He greeted the discovery with a string of lurid oaths, then hastened to one of the adjoining cells, and spoke to the half-awakened occupant:

"Do you want to git out o' hyer, Skinny? O' course you do; you'd be a pesky fool if ye didn't. Well, I've got special reasons for wantin' to let ye loose; an' if you'll cut sticks lively, I'll do it."

He had dropped his voice to a whisper in making this astonishing statement, but the prisoner was quick of ear and comprehension.

"Try me, one't!" he cried, sitting bolt upright on his cot. "Ef any one ketches me, after I'm safe outen hyer, they'll hev to hustle."

"Of course I'll have to rouse the town an' try to ketch you, Skinny. 'Twouldn't never do fer me not to. But I'll not try a mite harder'n I'm actilly boun' to; fer, as I said, I want ye to git away."

"They ain't no games 'bout this?" the prisoner demanded, not understanding why Hazelrig should thus want to favor him.

"None at all! An' if ye're goin' ye must go."

I can't stand hyer shilly-shallyin' all night, neither. If you ain't ready in jes' one minute, yer chance is gone."

"I'll be ready!"

And the horse-thief—for such he was—began to wriggle into his clothing.

Five minutes later, the jail bell was beginning to ring out its brazen warning and arouse the slumbering inhabitants of Silverton to the fact that another prisoner had escaped.

"You see, it war jes' this way," the jailer explained, as the people began to gather. "Them rotted singers were jes' the worst kind o' fakes. They pulled the wool over our eyes most beautiful. After you fellers went away las' night, there come another feller, and blamed fool like, I let him in."

"The three on 'em slep' right in my room, where I thought I could watch 'em easy, though I never s'picioned anything wrong. Well, may I be bung, if I didn't wake up a while ago an' find the hull b'ilin' of 'em gone—an' Skinny, the hoss-thief, gone along of 'em!"

He had added the third man to the number of the rescuers, so that the presence of Lewis Cavendish could be accounted for, should the trio be taken.

"They played a master cute game to git Skinny out; an' they got him. I never knowed of a cuter. I'm much afeard it's goin' to trouble us to overhaul 'em an' git 'em back."

Many others seemed to think the same. Nevertheless a hunt was commenced as soon as a sufficient number had gathered to make a respectable party.

Hazelrig had instructed Skinny to start westward, a direction opposite to the one in which he proposed to lead the search party; for, by a series of shrewd guesses, he had formed a fair idea of the route Cavendish and his rescuers would pursue.

By the time the jailer's party got under way, the detective and his friends had placed more than three miles of the rugged path behind them. They had scarcely gone three miles further, however, before they discovered they were being pursued—and by men on horseback. Hazelrig's forces, after considerable beating, had struck their trail near the point where it entered the timber; and, as there were several skilled trailers among them, they were enabled to proceed at a rapid rate in spite of the obstructions.

"That's bad," Ware observed, when, from a considerable elevation, he ascertained that they were being closely followed. "They will overtake us, soon, at that rate. We must try to conceal our trail, before going further."

This they did by walking backward for some distance, then swinging from tree to tree until they had covered several hundred feet. When they again dropped to the earth, they changed their course, and sought to conceal their footsteps by traversing the rockiest and flintiest ridges.

This maneuver was repeated several times, and with such apparent success, that, when more than hour had passed without sight or sound of the jailer's party, they began to feel so secure that they again became incautious.

They were made startlingly aware of the folly of this by the neighing of a horse, only a few hundred yards behind them!

Hazelrig, with a squad of his men, had gone on in the general direction which he believed the fugitives would follow, leaving the others to puzzle out the intricate trail. By rare good luck he had stumbled on a succession of footsteps in a mucky place, and was now hurrying forward, hoping to take the fleeing men unawares. But for the neigh of the horse he might have accomplished his purpose.

The detective's little party again scrambled to the tree-boughs. There were no flinty ridges near, but a mountain stream with worn and rocky banks, flowed not far away, and toward this they hastened.

On reaching it, they ran upward along its course for a considerable distance, and then concealed themselves in a hollow beneath the shelving banks.

"Cuddle down, and keep perfectly still!" Ware cautioned. "If they find us here it will be apt to go hard with us."

No words were needed to cause them to maintain strict silence. The dreadful fear of discovery glued their lips and almost stilled their breathing. The danger was greatly lessened, however, by the character of the place they had secreted themselves in. It was a cavity in the rocks, so thoroughly screened by bushes and undergrowth that its existence would not be suspected.

They had stumbled on it by the merest acci-

dent, and unless Hazelrig's men should do likewise, the chances were great that it would be overlooked.

"I don't like this business, at all!" the detective whispered, when several minutes had passed and they had not been disturbed. "We seem to be criminals instead of the men who are chasing us. I'm sometimes tempted to go out and boldly face the dogs. I would, if there were any men of honor among them."

"It would be suicidal!" Cavendish exclaimed. "They would shoot us down in our tracks, if the jailer should command them to. I've had quite enough of the honorable gentlemen of Silverton to last me several days. Hazelrig is a sample of the most of them; I saw that when they were trying to adjust a noose about my neck some weeks ago."

The sound of footsteps coming steadily nearer put a stop to the conversation. Ware drew his weapons, to be prepared for the worst, but the footsteps passed by, and they again breathed freely.

When almost an hour had passed without any indications that the searching party was still in the vicinity, they crawled from their place of concealment and recommenced their journey.

"They're looking for us in the direction of Rocket Range, I've no doubt," the detective observed. "With one party in our rear and another ahead of us, we'll be compelled to keep our eyes open. What worries me most, though, is the fear that they will go on into the town and give warning to Leonard, and thus allow him to slip through my clutches. I wouldn't have that happen for anything, for I've a heavy account laid up against the rascal."

When within about four miles of Rocket Range they received another scare. It was a little past noon, and they had halted to eat something and secure a much-needed rest. A considerable elevation lifted itself near them; and this Ware ascended to ascertain, if possible, if any of Hazelrig's party were close at hand.

"Hazelrig and his men are in camp not over a hundred yards away!" was his startling announcement on his return. "It's a wonder they haven't seen us. They are in our rear, and will move this way just as soon as they get ready to advance. We'll have to change our location, and as quickly and quietly as possible."

"Where shall we go?" Cavendish asked.

"To the top of the hill. It's the safest. There we can see and not be seen. They haven't enough force to surround it, should we be discovered; and while they are coming up one side we can skip down the other."

With great celerity, but very little noise, they hastened to the foot of the eminence; and keeping well within the timber, slowly and cautiously ascended its side.

Near the top they halted, and screened by bushes and boulders, looked down, with a sense of security, on the jailer and his little posse.

"They're waiting for the others to come up, I take it," said Cavendish, after studying their movements for awhile.

"I only hope they won't take it into their heads to go into the town!" Ware declared.

"If they do, Leonard won't fly, as you seem to think. He's too old a dog for that, and has too many friends there. He'll turn the entire affair some way so that it will serve to strengthen him and weaken us."

"Perhaps! I'm trusting, though, to the good sense of the honest element, and to the fact that most of his seeming friends are only paid tools or accomplices who can be frightened off by a show of legal authority. The first thing I shall do, you understand, will be to place him under arrest."

After nearly an hour's waiting, Hazelrig's men moved off in the direction of Rocket Range; and, when they were well out of sight, the trio descended from the crest of the hill and followed in their wake.

"This won't do," Ware averred, after they had proceeded a short distance. "I don't want them to beat us into town, which they'll do, of course, if we simply follow them. I propose that we strike for the trail. They're traveling slow, and once on that we can make such progress that our chances of getting in first will be excellent."

Accordingly they took a nigh cut to the well-beaten trail which ran from Rocket Range to Silverton, and pushed on with all possible speed.

They had proceeded along this new route but a little way, when they saw a horseman coming toward them.

"Get into the bushes!" the detective cried, recognizing the rider. "It's John Leonard!"

CHAPTER XIX.

"FANNY FULTON."

JOHN LEONARD had not been able to start for Silverton that day as early as he had expected; but when he did start he jogged along at a rapid gait, in the endeavor to reach the place at as early an hour as possible. His mind was filled with the details of the wicked scheme he had concocted against the life of the prisoner in the Silverton jail, and he gave little heed to the route he was pursuing.

Hence he failed to see the forms that flitted, shadow-like to the cover of the bushes, and recked not of danger until it was too late to escape.

He was aroused by the detective's sharp command:

"Climb down from there; and be quick about it, if you care to keep a whole skin, John Leonard."

Leonard reined in, with a gasp of surprise, being so startled by the suddenness and unexpectedness of the order that he threw the horse almost upon its haunches.

Then, out of the covert came the three, the detective with revolver held in readiness.

As soon as the astonished man recognized them, he attempted to spur forward, but Cavendish seized the animal by the bit.

"No you don't!" Ware grated, thrusting the revolver into the face of the frightened wretch. "We've a little account to settle with you first. We're in no mood for trifling, and if you don't want a bullet, you'll get out of that saddle with as little ceremony as you know how."

There was something in the tones that quite unnerved Leonard.

"Yes! yes!" he assented. "I'll get down! What is it you want with me, gentlemen? I haven't enough money with me to pay for the plucking."

"It isn't money we're after, Leonard," the detective declared, as the trembling man scrambled out of the saddle, "and no one knows that better than you do. What we're after, I should think you might guess, unless your judgment has suddenly failed you. It is usually pretty good, as I have had reason to know."

"For mercy sake, gentlemen, what do you want with me, then?" Leonard faltered. "Surely you're not going to murder me!"

"We'll talk that over after we get into the bushes. Here we're in danger of interruption. Lead the horse, Harry; Lew and I will endeavor to see that our good friend does not escape."

With this, he dropped in behind his prisoner, and inexorably urged him forward.

"You recognize this young gentleman, no doubt?" dropping to a seat on a stone when they had reached a safe distance, and pointing a finger at Lewis. "If not, allow me make you acquainted with Mr. Lewis Cavendish, recently of Chicago; more recently of Silverton Jail."

As he said it, his eyes burned with a light which showed he was in no trifling humor.

With a hard, bitter tone he ran quickly over the points he most wished to impress on Leonard's mind, adding, at the conclusion:

"You're in the net, Leonard, and wriggling won't do you any good. A clean breast of the whole affair might ease your conscience, though, and make your punishment lighter. That fifty thousand, too, must be repaid as a preliminary."

Leonard's face had taken on a corpse-like pallor and his whole form shook.

"I can't repay it!" he moaned, wiping away the sweat which stood in great drops on his forehead. "Do what you will with me I can't repay it. I was urged to the deed by threatened bankruptcy, and the bankruptcy has come notwithstanding."

"But the Jim Crow Mine, and your silver mining stocks!"

"All plastered over with debts which I now see are unpayable. My God, gentlemen! You don't know how I've suffered. I thought that fifty thousand would tide me over, and enable me to get on my feet again. I week ago I saw that the crash must come, and have been preparing for it. I acknowledge I had designs against the life of Mr. Cavendish. I knew that when I could no longer pay, my tools would fall away from me. I thought to put him out of the way, so that when I left this place, he would not hound me over the world for the crime I committed against him."

He groaned, as he made the confession.

"I am guilty and I must suffer. I see it now. How my creditors will come down on me, as soon as they discover I haven't the wherewith to pay!"

"And no doubt Miss Fulton and Shelby Tanner are equally guilty!" the detective asserted.

"Tanner, yes. Perhaps I oughtn't say that."

He was only one of my paid tools. He has been running the saloon and hotel under his own name, but the property is really mine. It's mortgaged, too, for more than it's worth. Mortgaged by Tanner, for me, as if it were his own property."

He stopped, and his face relaxed into the semblance of a smile.

"Strange you never guessed Miss Fulton's secret. I'll reveal it now, as it can be kept a secret no longer. I am Miss Fanny Fulton!"

The detective recoiled in utter astonishment.

"Impossible!"

"Not at all!" with a light chuckle. "I played the part well, you must admit. I am Miss Fulton, minus the female apparel, the false hair, the rouge and powder, and all the little accessories which went to make up the gushing creature."

Ware seemed crushed by the confession. With all his natural shrewdness and his long experience in dealing with criminals of every grade he had never suspected the deceit that had been so boldly practiced on him.

"That goes ahead of anything I ever heard of!" he gasped. "No wonder the dear creature gave me so much trouble. No wonder I couldn't begin to fathom her motives or determine what line of action she was likely to pursue."

"It explains a good many things, too, that have been almost unexplainable."

"No doubt!" Leonard exclaimed, bubbling over with the momentary pleasure which the exposure afforded him, and striving, apparently, to temporarily forget the terrors of his situation. "I got a good deal of fun out of the little comedy as I went along. I didn't begin it, though, merely for the fun of the thing. I had a purpose in view."

"That purpose, at first, was to gain the confidence and thwart the efforts of Miss Malcolm. It succeeded, and when you appeared on the scene I continued the disguise in an effort to disclose your intentions and plans."

"I dropped the stolen letter when and where I did, knowing the boy would find it, and that you would be led to visit and confer with Miss Malcolm, if my suspicions regarding your true character were correct. You made that visit; and when you told her who you were and what had brought you there, I was crouching just outside the window and heard it all."

"You devil!" Ware cried, a feeling of terror taking momentary possession of him.

"Don't be too hard on me," Leonard whimpered, all the life suddenly taken out of him. "I'll confess everything, and do just what you say. Only don't be too hard on me!"

The innate cowardice of the man's soul shone forth in that moment of terror. Regardless of other men's lives, he yet clung with blind instinct to his own. It is the trait which characterizes all cowards, and Leonard seemed to combine in his own person the cruelty, cunning and craven fear of his class.

Not knowing that Buck Hazelrig's men were standing in readiness to aid him, Leonard repeated the confession to the officials, on his arrival in Rocket Range, and, in due course of time, was imprisoned for his crimes, as he justly deserved to be, Tanner and Hazelrig sharing in his punishment.

The trial, one of the most memorable in the annals of Rocket Range, had scarcely closed before Lewis Cavendish and Maud Malcolm were united for life.

The money taken by Leonard was never recovered, but young Cavendish's inheritance was large enough to permit its loss without seriously crippling his financial condition. Since that foolish trip westward he has gained business judgment and the discretion which comes with years, and is now a prosperous merchant of his native city.

Harry, now grown to manhood, is his partner, and Warbling William, who still follows his old-time calling, is numbered with their dearest friends.

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